

LONDON THE READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

No. 1452.—VOL. LVI.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING FEBRUARY 28, 1891.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[MADLINE HELD TIGHT, AND WITH ALMOST HERCULEAN STRENGTH HER RESCUER DREW HER UP.]

THE HEIRESS OF DEEPDENE.

CHAPTER IV.

A NEW BEGINNING.

YES, Godfrey had left, with as little delay as possible, the scene of his recent humiliation; and generous though he was, he could not forbear bitter feelings towards the girl who had supplanted him.

It was very galling for him to think of Deepdene in the hands of a stranger—Deepdene that he had been taught to look upon as his future home, and that he had grown to love with an affection that was rooted in the best and truest part of his nature.

Besides, he was utterly in the dark as to how his disinheritor had come about, and for lack of a better motive was forced to lay it to the charge of Madeline Brereton, who had—as his half-sister expressed it—“plotted and planned” to push herself into his place.

It is true that twelve months ago, when he applied to Sir Richard for money, the Baronet

had peremptorily refused the request, and had added that under present circumstances he had no desire to see his nephew—a hint that set Godfrey's pride on fire, and effectually prevented him from thrusting his company on Sir Richard.

It was in the same letter that the Baronet had hinted at the possibility of marrying; but Godfrey had merely laughed at this threat, and it had not troubled him in the smallest degree.

“I wish he had married!” he declared to Keziah Byrne, as they were on the way to the station. “It would not hurt me so much if the old place were in the hands of one who had a claim to the name of Vane; but this girl—”

He stopped in disgust. Words that would have been strong enough to express his contempt for Madeline would have been too strong for him to permit himself to use.

Not so Miss Byrne, who allowed her tongue full license, and poured forth the vials of her wrath on the devoted head of Sir Richard's heiress, without troubling herself to reflect

whether or not the girl deserved all these strictures.

The journey up to town was a silent one, but just before they reached London Godfrey suddenly said,—

“I've been thinking over my position, Keziah, and, really, it's so very bad that it couldn't well be worse. I shall have to sell out of the army, and look about for something to do—”

“Something to do!” screamed Miss Keziah, lifting her hands in pious horror at the notion. “Oh, Godfrey, how terrible! But surely you can live on the three hundred a year that that wretched old man has left you!”

“Don't call names, Keziah. As for living on it, no doubt I could do so if it were not for my debts; but I must pay them, and, in order to do it, I must realise my annuity. Yes,” he added, with a grim smile, “I must begin life over again—not a very pleasant prospect for a man approaching thirty, is it?”

His half-sister sniffed by way of reply, and was so overcome by her feelings that she buried her face in her handkerchief, and continued sniffing until Paddington was reached

—by which time it was growing dusk, and a drizzling rain was falling, which made even the June evening feel raw and cold.

Godfrey hurried outside in search of a hansom, but before he had succeeded in finding one a light touch on his arm made him look round. By his side stood a woman, tricked out in some gaudy finery that made the painted pallor of her face look even more horrible than it would have done.

She was young—not more than three-and-twenty at the most; but, oh! how worn and haggard and lined her face was! And yet it was a pretty face still; the eyes were large and dark, and unnaturally lustrous; the hair waved in soft, clinging tendrils away from a white brow; the mouth small, and curved like a child's.

She had begun to say something when Godfrey turned round, but as her eye fell on his face, a little, half-smothered shriek escaped her lips, and her hand fell limply to her side.

"You!" said the young man, in a voice so low that it was almost a whisper. "Nelly!" But she did not wait to hear more. Swiftly and noiselessly she disappeared amongst the shadows of the station, while Godfrey stood as if rooted to the spot, unable to move.

"Good gracious me!" exclaimed Miss Keziah, hurrying out. "What a time you are, Godfrey! How much longer are you going to keep me shivering and shivering in this abominable station, I wonder?" She peered curiously into his face, and her own changed. "What is the matter, Godfrey?" she asked, in a subdued voice. "You look as if you had seen a ghost!"

"So I have," he rejoined, mechanically; but when she asked him to explain his words, he only laughed, and said he thought his brain must be giving way under the strain of the events that the last few hours had brought forth.

Poor Madeline! A veritable heart sickness fell upon her as she saw Godfrey driving away from Deepdene, and she seemed to take with him all her new-born hopes of convincing him that she was not the mercenary creature he believed her to be.

She felt that she could not write to him half what she could have said, and yet a letter was now her only alternative, since there was little chance of their meeting for some time. Accordingly, as soon as she reached her own room, she sat down to her desk, and began her difficult task—for it was difficult to put down in black and white words that would have flowed easily enough from her lips at a personal interview.

She did her best to make the letter brief and businesslike, simply telling him that she had been in perfect ignorance of Sir Richard's intentions with regard to her, and that her sense of justice could not permit her to retain the Deepdene estates, which, directly she was of age, she purposed handing over to him.

She breathed a sigh of relief when she had signed her name, and placed this letter in its envelope. Then came the task of directing it, and a faint little smile curved the girl's weary lips as she wrote the address, for she thought of those dreams that had come to her in the dusk of sweet summer evenings, when she had looked up at the young officer's picture in the gallery, and had told herself that this must surely be her hero—the Prince of the fairy tale, whose coming would bring all the joy of the world in its train!

Wild visions! How utterly they were scattered to the winds now!

With her letter in her hand she descended the stairs, and in the hall, she was met by Dr. Earnshaw, who stepped on one side, and watched her while she put the missive in the post-bag.

"I have been writing to Captain Vane," she said, a trace of defiance in her tone, that betrayed itself in spite of herself.

He smiled—the dark, slow smile which in the time to come she grew to hate and fear.

"You have lost no time, Madeline!"

"No; in a case like this one does not need to lose time. An injustice cannot be remedied too soon."

He did not reply, and she paused on upstairs again without adding more. At the top of the staircase she met the housekeeper, who bowed with obsequious politeness.

"I was just coming to ask you, miss, whether there was anything I could do for you?" said Mrs. Soames, in the smoothest and most respectful of voices. "Would you like me to send you some tea to your room, or will you have it laid downstairs?"

The girl stared for a moment in amazement at the change in the housekeeper's tones. She remembered how Mrs. Soames had addressed her when she came to announce the arrival of Miss Byrne, and the contrast made her smile a little scornfully.

"Thank you, Sarah can bring me a cup of tea—that is all I require," she said, briefly, and would have passed on had not the housekeeper detained her.

"I hope, miss, that you'll let bygones be bygones, and I'm sure I've been in my heart devoted to you ever since you first came here," declared Mrs. Soames, with fervid eloquence. "It would just kill me to be sent away from a home where I've spent the best years of my life."

"I have no intention of sending you away," Madeline rejoined, coldly; but as she went on she could not help thinking of the difference Sir Richard's will had wrought in her position, and of the splendid destiny she was on the point of giving up.

Very impatiently she waited for Godfrey's reply to her letter, but it did not come. First days, then weeks passed away, and still no answer; until at last Madeline gave up all hope of ever receiving one.

The girl was fairly indignant at his silence, which was an insult that she certainly had not deserved.

"I suppose he does not think I am worth writing to; and puts no faith in my keeping my promises when I come of age," she said to herself, while tears of angry humiliation started to her eyes. "Well, I have done all I can, and now I must wait until I am twenty-one."

She said nothing to Dr. Earnshaw of her disappointment, and he, on his part, made no allusion to the matter.

To do him justice, he behaved with extreme kindness to his young ward, trying his best to provide her with amusement in the shape of all the new books, and treating her with that delicate attention which is so well calculated to win a woman's heart, and which, in spite of herself, began to make Madeline fancy she had hardly done justice to her whilom suitor.

And so the months passed away—July and August, and the monotony of our heroine's life was undisturbed by any more exciting incident than an occasional visit to the county town, or the arrival of a box of books from Mudie's.

But in the last week of August a change came in the shape of a letter from one of her old schoolfellows—a girl who had left school to go to America, and of whom Madeline hardly hoped to hear again.

She wrote to say that she had applied to the schoolmistress at Brussels for Madeline's address, and learned, to her delight, that she was in England.

She herself had married an English squire, whose home was in Warwickshire, and there she invited the young girl to visit her, adding that nothing would give her more pleasure than to see her former friend again.

Of course, she was unaware of Madeline's change of fortune, and fancied she was at Deepdene either as governess or companion.

Madeline accepted the invitation with alacrity. Truth to tell, she was growing tired of being by herself so much—tired of pacing the lawns and walks of Deepdene with no companion save Dr. Earnshaw or her own

thoughts, and the prospect of an entire change was very welcome to her.

Dr. Earnshaw did not seem to greet it quite so delightedly; indeed, he first threw difficulties in the way, which Madeline, however, quickly overruled.

Then he suddenly remembered he had friends of his own living quite near to the Trehernes, and declared his intention of staying a few days with them during the young girl's visit.

"I will take you down," he said, in conclusion, "and see you safely into Mrs. Treherne's hands."

"There is no necessity for your doing so," she returned, with a slight knitting of her fine brows. "I am perfectly able to take care of myself."

"Are you?" he asked, smilingly. "Perhaps so, but at the same time you are far too precious for me to trust you with no other protection. Besides"—and he bent a little closer—"there can be no greater pleasure on earth for me than to be near you."

Madeline made a swift gesture of impatience, and turned away. This was what she disliked in Dr. Earnshaw—the constant reminders of that interview of theirs in the garden at Deepdene, which she would gladly have forgotten.

Her preparations for her visit helped to put all other thoughts out of her mind, and for two or three days before her journey she and Sarah—who was to accompany her as her maid—were occupied in turning over her wardrobe, and renovating such of her gowns as were in want of this attention.

Madeline had a curious feeling all this time—a sort of prophetic instinct that some great and startling changes were about to alter the current of her life; but how great, and how startling these changes were destined to be, her wildest imaginings could hardly have shadowed forth!

CHAPTER V.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

It was about five o'clock on an early September afternoon that Madeline, accompanied by Sarah and Dr. Earnshaw, arrived at Brimsford—a pretty little out-of-the-world station, with its name spelt out in white shells, and with flowing scrolls of magnificence and late roses making themselves agreeably apparent above the less pleasant ones of smoke and train oil.

On the platform stood Katie Treherne—the faintest little blue-eyed, golden-haired creature it is possible to imagine, dressed in the coolest and most elegant of white China silk costumes, and wearing a big bunch of cornflowers on her left shoulder, and another and a bigger on the top of her parasol.

Mrs. Treherne always looked as if she had just stepped out of a fashion-book or a band-box, and her frocks invariably fitted her as a jelly fits its mould. Other women often wondered with complaining envy how it was she contrived to get her dresses made so beautifully; but though she told them the name of her dressmaker she did not tell them her secret!

"My dear Madeline—how delightful to see you again! Two long years since we met, and such a lot happened since then!" she exclaimed, in her breathless, impetuous fashion, embracing the young girl with affectionate cordiality. "Why, I do declare you have grown—yes, actually grown since I saw you! Who would have imagined it possible?"

She rattled on for a few minutes longer, then Madeline introduced Dr. Earnshaw to her, and after that the two friends got into a pretty little carriage, drawn by a pair of cream ponies that was waiting outside; the tiny groom sprang up behind, Dr. Earnshaw stood, hat in hand, wishing them good-bye; and then Mrs. Treherne cracked her whip, and the ponies set off at a smart trot in the

direction of Brackendale House—their mistress chatting all the time in her pretty, inconsequent fashion.

She reminded Madeline of a piece of Dresden china—very delicate, very fragile, and very beautifully tinted.

"Who would have thought that we should meet again in this fashion?" she exclaimed, as they drove along between high, wild, unpruned hedges, where in their turn hawthorn and dog roses, honeysuckle and convolvulus blossomed out their brief lives, and had now given way to the scarlet berries of the briony. "We shall have such long arrears of gossip to make up. You must tell me everything that has happened to you since you left school, and I'll give you my history. It isn't much of one, after all. I went to America after I left Brussels, met Jack Treherne, fell in love with him, and—married him! What's more, I haven't regretted it yet. Strange, isn't it?"

"Is it strange?" asked Madeline, laughing. "Of course it is," promptly responded the little lady. "Then I have the loveliest baby in the world, with a head just like a little yellow duckling—all fluff, you know—and a house pretty enough for an artist to paint. Don't you think I'm lucky?"

"Very!" was the response. There was not much necessity for Madeline to talk when she was with Katie Treherne, for, of all the sounds on earth the one that lady loved was her own musical voice!

Her estimate of her home was a just one, for a prettier it would have been difficult to imagine.

It was a dark red-brick house, with gables, and French casement windows, partially overgrown with ivy, and having a rustic portico that was now completely covered with the royal purple blossoms of the clematis.

Before it spread out a lawn as smooth and level as a billiard-table, and beyond this a small shrubby led into a larger plantation of oaks and beeches.

"Jack," otherwise Mr. Treherne, came strolling across the lawn to meet his wife's guests.

He was a big, lazy, brown-haired man, with a huge moustache, and a good-natured smile—an easy-going man as a rule; but one whom it was rather dangerous to rouse to anger.

"Poor Jack!" murmured his wife, after she had presented him to Madeline. "He has not been out shooting to-day; and, like the Roman Emperor, he feels he has lost a day. Never mind, dear! you'll have your own shooting-party to-morrow, and then you can sally forth six days in the week, and destroy as many poor little unoffending dicky birds as you like!"

Mr. Treherne laughed, and pinched his wife's delicate pink ear. You needed to see the couple only ten minutes together to find out how devoted they were to each other.

Moreover, they were both thoroughly amiable, kind-hearted people, and Madeline felt at home with them directly.

The greater part of that evening was spent in wandering about the grounds, and so our heroine had no opportunity of confiding her history to her hosts, and the next morning Katie was so busy, making arrangements with the housekeeper for the reception of the expected guests that Madeline was sent out for a walk by herself—a "voyage of discovery," as she called it; for, of course, she knew nothing of the country, this being her first visit to Warwickshire.

How lovely it was in the sweet September sunshine, with the leaves beginning to redden under the touch of autumn's fingers!

The sky was a deep, intense blue, the air was soft and mellow and delicious, and the trees in the orchard were laden with golden and crimson fruit.

Unconsciously, Madeline felt her spirits rising into a buoyancy that had never been hers since Sir Richard Vane's death. All her troubles were, for the moment, forgotten, and the divine spirit of youth reasserted itself in all its strength.

On her way home she chose the path through a wood, trusting to chance that it would take her back to Brackendale; but before she had proceeded very far she found herself stopped by some old ruins, which were picturesquely overgrown with ivy, and on one of the fallen stones of which she sat down to rest.

After a few minutes, however, during which she had been examining, with some curioity, a massive tower which was the only part of the building that remained intact she determined to ascend to the top, and see what sort of a view was obtainable of the surrounding country.

No sooner thought of than done—nor, when she stood on the highest point, did she regret her trouble, for the view was indeed very fine. But her enthusiasm made her forget that any danger might exist, until she was sharply and unpleasantly reminded of it by the giving way of the very stone on which she was standing, and which actually seemed to crumble away beneath her feet.

Then in a minute she knew she was falling, and with the instinct of self-preservation that is always keenest in moments of danger, she desperately grasped at the slender bough of a tree which had taken root in a handful of earth between the masonry, and which served to keep her suspended in the air.

But she knew she could only hang thus for a few minutes, and her heart grew sick within her as she thought of those scattered stones lying so far below, and the horrible fate that awaited her.

Her voice rang out in a sudden agonized cry for "Help!" but it was with little hope that assistance would reach her, for there was not much chance of any other human being, save herself, choosing such a lonely and unfrequented path as she had selected.

The seconds appeared to lengthen themselves into minutes—the minutes into hours, and it seemed to her she felt the fragile boughs which bore her giving way beneath her weight. Once more she sent forth a cry, and this time—thanks be to Heaven!—it was answered by a man's voice.

Before the echo had died away the man himself stood on the summit of the Tower, looking over, and calculating the distance between himself and the young girl. She was about a couple of feet below him, and the task of saving her would necessarily be one both of difficulty and danger—danger, lest in leaning over he should be overbalanced by her weight, and then both would be precipitated to the earth below.

He was a man of prompt action, and even while these calculations flashed through his brain he had thrown himself flat on the top of the tower, and, bending downwards, had grasped her one wrist with his right hand.

"Hold tight to me," he said, "but don't loose the bough with your other hand until I tell you. Do you understand?"

By her obedience she showed that she did, and at last, by dint of infinite patience, and the exercise of almost Herculean strength, he drew her upwards, and she stood in safety beside him.

Then she looked into his face, and saw that her rescuer was none other than Godfrey Vane!

CHAPTER VI.

MADLINE'S RESOLVE.

FOR the moment Godfrey did not recognise her. It must be remembered that he had only seen her once, and then it was in a dark room, where she sat with her back to the light. Besides, she looked very different to-day to what she had done on the day of the funeral, when her pale cheeks and unbecoming attire had obscured her beauty. This morning she wore a very pretty white gown, with a broad, black sash, and black ribbon bow, and a large straw hat that made a picturesque setting for her delicate face. A wave of rich carmine flooded her cheeks as

her eyes fell upon him, and Godfrey thought he had seldom seen a prettier picture than she, in her confusion, presented.

His name fell involuntarily from her lips; and then, to his great surprise, he became aware of her identity, and he drew back a little, his face shadowing, as she was quick to observe.

"You, Miss Brereton!" he exclaimed. "This is an unexpected meeting."

"And, I fear, as unpleasant for you as it is unexpected," she returned, quickly. "But, at least, you will let me thank you for the service you have rendered me. You have saved my life, and I am deeply grateful to you."

He frowned a little, and bit the end of his moustache. For once in his life Godfrey Vane was taken at a disadvantage, and hardly knew what to say.

To deny that the meeting was unpleasant would have been to utter a distinct untruth, but to tell a young and pretty girl that her presence was distasteful to him was a rudeness of which he would have cut his tongue off rather than be guilty.

"You over-rate the assistance which I have fortunately been able to render you," he said, at last, in tones that sounded rather embarrassed. "Had you not better descend? The Tower itself is supposed to be unsafe, and the sooner we are out of it the better."

She at once complied with his suggestion; but as she was going down her brain was in a wheel of conflicting thoughts.

What a strange trick Fate had played on her when it decreed that this man, of all others, should be the one to save her from death—and at the risk of his own life too!

Godfrey was hardly less agitated, though in his case, agitation was accompanied by extreme annoyance.

As much as he could dislike and mistrust a woman, he disliked and mistrusted Madeline Brereton, and he had hoped very sincerely that their paths having once crossed would in future diverge in totally opposite directions. And here, on the very first day of his visit to Warwickshire, she was the first person to whom he had spoken!

If he had been less occupied with his own thoughts he would have noticed how white Madeline had suddenly become.

Until it was over, she herself hardly knew the intensity of the strain that had been put on her nerves during those few minutes when she and Death had been so close together; but as soon as she reached *terra firma* the reaction came, and she reeled suddenly backwards, throwing out her arms in a wild endeavour to catch hold of something that would prevent her from falling.

Godfrey was just in time to save her, but he did not support her one moment more than was absolutely necessary—former experiences with his half-sister had taught him that the best position for a fainting woman is a recumbent one.

With more haste than gentleness he placed Madeline on the grass, with her head resting on a moss-covered stone, and then hurried off to a little spring near to fetch some water.

But before his return the young girl had partially recovered, and was feeling considerably ashamed of herself for her betrayal of weakness.

She, however, drank the water that Godfrey gave her in the cup belonging to his pocket flask, and then got up, and declared her intention of going on home.

The officer looked at her doubtfully. She was still so white that he could not reconcile it to his conscience to let her go alone, although he very much disliked the idea of being her companion.

"How far have you to walk?" he inquired.

"I don't quite know, but about a mile I should think. I am staying at Brackendale House."

He started violently.

"What! with the Trehernes?"

"Yes. Do you know them?"

"Very well indeed. In point of fact, I was on my way there at the present moment." Madeline looked at him in blank dismay.

"Then are you one of the guests who are expected for Mr. Treherne's shooting party?"

"I was," he returned, falling to his old trick of pulling his moustache. "Jack Treherne is one of my oldest friends, and I invariably spend a fortnight with him in September. I came by an earlier train to-day than I intended, and as there was no sort of conveyance to be had at the station I determined to walk." He paused, and looked away from her, apparently in indecision; then he added, "I suppose you are one of Mrs. Treherne's friends?"

"Yes. She and I were at school together. I only arrived at Brackendale yesterday evening!"

"Ah! Then you will probably make a visit of two or three weeks' duration?"

Madeline flushed hotly as she guessed the motive of this question.

"I intended staying a fortnight, but," she continued, impulsively, "I will go away this very day if you wish it!"

Godfrey knitted his brows together in seeming annoyance at the suggestion.

"Certainly not!" he said, promptly.

"There is no reason at all why you should curtail your visit; but as our presence in the same house could hardly be a source of pleasure to either of us I will put off my stay with the Trehernes until a month later. They need know nothing of our meeting this morning, and I can get back to town by the midday train, and then wire that I am prevented fulfilling my engagement by affairs of business. I think that will be the best way of getting over the difficulty."

At any rate, it was the one that showed the most consideration for her, and poor Madeline felt that she owed him some sort of gratitude for thus solving the problem.

But, as Burns says,—

"The best laid schemes of mice and men,
Gang oft awry."

And this one of Godfrey's was no exception to the rule.

Hardly had he finished speaking when the burly form of Jack Treherne, clad in brown velvet shooting costume, and followed by a couple of pointers, came in sight.

"Why, Godfrey!" he exclaimed, greatly surprised at the unexpected apparition of his friend in the company of Miss Brereton. "What brings you here? I didn't expect you till the afternoon train!"

"I don't suppose you did," returned Vane, laughing off his embarrassment; but I hope your welcome is none the less sincere on that account."

"My dear fellow, how can you suggest such a thing! You know Miss Brereton?" interrogatively.

Godfrey bowed without speaking, and Madeline—somewhat to her own surprise—filled in the pause by narrating how Captain Vane had come to her assistance in the Tower—a story that Mr. Treherne interrupted once or twice with exclamations of consternation.

"What could have induced you to run such a risk, Miss Brereton?" he said, reproachfully, as she finished. "Didn't you see the boards up warning people how unsafe the Tower was?"

"No, I didn't notice them," she rejoined, with affected lightness. "However, 'all's well that ends well,' and I'm none the worse for my adventure."

"No!" grutely; "but you would have been if Vane had not made so opportune an appearance. As for those boards, I must have them placed in more conspicuous positions, so that there may be no chance of anyone else emulating your achievements. Excuse me a minute, I'll just see that no mischievous tramp has been tampering with them."

He went off on his errand, followed by the dogs, thus leaving Madeline and Godfrey alone. Somehow, the young girl's sense of

humour was touched by the drollness of the situation, and there was the shadow of a smile round the corners of her lips, and she turned to him and said,—

"I'm afraid your plan has been nipped in the bud. You must think of another one!"

He did not reply, but kept his eyes fixed on the ground, not quite seeing how he was to extricate himself from the dilemma without explaining matters to his host. And from that he branched with a gentleman's instinctive courtesy, for it would naturally have the result of prejudicing Madeline in the eyes of Treherne and his wife.

In the interval that ensued it flashed through the young girl's mind that if she could only take advantage of this accident that had thrown her and Godfrey together she might be able finally to justify herself in his eyes, and perhaps even—who could tell?—win his friendship.

She forgot the insult he had put upon her in not answering her letter. She forgot everything, in fact, save her intense desire that he should know she was not the scheming, selfish adventuress events had made him believe her. Surely, if they were together in the same house, she would be able to convince him of her innocence, and of the sincerity of her desire to give the Deepdene estates up to him, directly the law gave her liberty to do so?

"Captain Vane," she said, speaking in a quick, low, eager voice, "will it not be better for us both to return to Brackendale House, and accept the situation that has been in a manner thrust upon us? We need not see much of each other during our visit, and neither Mr. nor Mrs. Treherne know anything of the circumstances of our former meeting, so that there will be no comments."

She had not time to say more, for Jack Treherne just then came back, breathing anathemas against the villains who had dared to take his board down—for the boards were gone, and had probably been converted into firewood long before this!

Godfrey felt that he had no alternative but to go back with his host; but he mentally cursed the mischievous fate which had put him in such a hole, and resolved that first thing to-morrow morning he would give instructions for a telegram to be sent, which would take him back to London, in order to attend to those "important business engagements" which are such a boon to people when they are making duty visits!

At the same time, he regretted the necessity, for he had looked forward with a good deal of pleasure to his stay with the Trehernes—and pleasure did not come in Godfrey's way quite so often now as of yore.

Besides, directly he saw Katie Treherne he had taken a fancy to her. She was so bright and pretty and winsome that he would have liked to cultivate her acquaintance and make a friend of her—but the fates, he told himself, were against it.

Of course the recital of Madeline's adventure caused a good deal of excitement, and Katie was inclined to magnify Godfrey into a hero in consequence. Indeed, she felt rather cross with Madeline herself because she was so reticent on the matter.

That same evening the two other expected guests arrived—Major Winter and Mr. Selwin, both old friends of Jack's, and both enthusiastic sportsmen.

"But they are neither of them half so good-looking as Captain Vane!" declared Mrs. Treherne, coming into Madeline's room a quarter of an hour before dinner, to bring her some white roses. "For my part, if I were not married I should fall straight away in love with him. In point of fact, I have fallen in love with him already!" she added, unblushingly.

Madeline looked away, and busied herself with the arrangement of her long tresses of fine, soft hair to avoid replying.

"Jack says he has had a disappointment about some money lately," went on Katie, putting

her head on one side to admire the long spray of roses and maidenhair fern that her white fingers had skillfully manipulated while she was talking. "I don't know any of the particulars, but I believe the poor fellow has had to leave the army in order to pay his debts, and he is now looking out for something to do in the way of a secretaryship of a club, or an appointment of that kind. He doesn't look like a man who has to earn his own living, does he?"

Madeline murmured a negative answer, but refused to be drawn into a discussion of the young officer's various perfections—rather to the disappointment of Katie, whose brain had been constructing the romance that she felt ought certainly to follow the singular meeting of the two young people—for Mrs. Treherne was a thorough matchmaker, and simply revelled in the idea of getting such a handsome husband for Madeline.

Perhaps it was owing to this that she was so particular with regard to the young girl's appearance that evening; for after Madeline had turned from the glass, and declared herself ready to descend, Mrs. Treherne made her sit down again, while she administered a few "finishing touches," as she called them.

"There!" she exclaimed, when all the "touches" had been given, "now look at yourself, and tell me if I haven't improved you!"

Madeline could not deny the truth of this statement, and it may be that a faint thrill of pleased vanity stirred her heart for just a minute as she saw the charming image given back by the mirror.

Her usually statuesque features were warmed into life by an exquisite flush of brightest carmine that played on her cheeks; the large, dark eyes were softly lustrous beneath the shade of their silken lashes; and the open bodice of her black lace dress showed to perfection the pearly tints of throat and neck.

On the left side of the bodice Mrs. Treherne had fastened the spray of roses and ferns, and one single blossom, relieved only by its own green leaves, gleamed from the thick coils of hair, piled high on the classic head. Yes, Madeline certainly looked very charming indeed!

Of course, Mrs. Treherne arranged for Captain Vane to take the young girl in to dinner, and was greatly puzzled at the expression on his face when she told him to give his arm to Miss Brereton—an honour eagerly coveted by the other two unmarried men.

Godfrey had no alternative but to obey his hostess, but that he did it unwillingly was plainly to be seen.

The flush on Madeline's face grew deeper, but her heart began to beat more rapidly, with a sort of defiance.

"He shall change his opinion of me!" she said to herself. "It is a battle between us—surely the strangest battle that ever was fought—and I will win!"

Acting under this impulse she refused to be chilled by his coldness, or silenced by his brief answers. Her usual shyness gave way before the new excitement, and she was as bright and witty as the hostess herself.

Her mirthful sallies kept the table amused during the whole of dinner time, and even Godfrey was forced to join in the laughter, although, to do him justice, he tried his best to play the part of Death's Head at the feast.

After the ladies had gone to the drawing-room a sudden change came over Madeline, and, to Mrs. Treherne's great surprise, she burst into tears.

"My dear child, what can be the matter with you?" Katie asked, in great concern, coming to her side.

"Nothing. I am excited and overwrought, that is all," Madeline answered, trying to smile through her tears. "Leave me alone for a few minutes, dear, and I shall be all right. I think I'll go into the air; perhaps that will help to make me more ashamed of myself, and then I shall recover all the quicker."

Mrs. Treherne nodded assent, and the young girl stepped through the open French window out on the lawn, where she seated herself under the spreading branches of a copper beech.

It was a beautiful night, balmy and still, and lit by the soft radiance of thousands of stars, gleaming like points of yellow light in the infinite depths of the purple heavens.

Faint odours floated out from the dew-drenched flowers, and the melancholy note of the cornorake from the fields down by the river was the only sound that broke their stillness.

The copper beech was exactly opposite the dining-room, the windows of which were wide open, so that, herself unseen, Madeline could observe everything that was going on inside.

Dessert was still on the flower-decked table, and the decanters were in the process of being passed round, while the gentlemen smoked their cigars.

Presently, however, they rose and left the room—all but Godfrey Vane, who, instead of following, came to the window and looked out, apparently absorbed in thought.

Madeline had not much difficulty in guessing the subject of his meditations, which, to judge from his knitted brows and sombre air, were of a decidedly unpleasant character; but her attention was suddenly drawn away from him by the sound of a half-smothered curse, which seemed to come from a group of laurel bushes on her left.

At the same moment the sharp, stinging report of a pistol rang out on the night air; and, with a sick horror, she saw the form of Godfrey, which had been distinctly outlined against the light within, stagger backwards, and then fall heavily to the floor.

(To be continued.)

THE BELLE OF THE SEASON.

CHAPTER XXVII.—(continued.)

ROSENBERY looked abashed. He was really ashamed of his late conduct, or sorry that he had made such a manifestation of his feeling, but he was rejoiced that something had occurred that might possibly prevent Walter from seeking Lady Rosenberg's society.

"I spoke before I thought, mother," he said, after a brief silence.

"Make no more apologies, Raymond!" interrupted her ladyship, with flushed cheeks. "We will endeavour to place a charitable construction upon your late conduct if you say nothing! But now go!"

Rosenbery hesitated, glanced from one to the other, and then bowed and departed.

"I think he is not right in his mind, Walter," said her ladyship, when he had gone. "Promise me, my dear boy, that you will never be drawn into a fight with him. Promise me!"

Walter readily promised. He had no wish to fight the son of his benefactors.

Her ladyship's pale countenance and trembling frame showed how deeply outraged her feelings had been by Rosenberg's late conduct, and Walter exerted himself to soothe and comfort her.

He had barely succeeded in the efforts when the Lady Geraldine Summers entered the boudoir, unannounced.

Both Lady Rosenberg and Walter arose to meet her, surprised at her opportune appearance.

"Walter here!" exclaimed Geraldine, with a blush and start. "I did not expect to see him here."

Lady Rosenberg smiled, well knowing that if the girl had suspected him to be there her delicacy might have prompted her to remain away.

"Oh, Walter," said Lady Geraldine, after greeting her friend warmly, "can you forgive

the shameful treatment you have received at my uncle's hands?"

Walter signified that he could.

"I had a conversation with the Earl before coming here," she continued, "and we have arrived at an understanding, although it is very unfavourable to us. He is determined that I shall marry Lord Rosenberg!"

"Heaven forbid!" breathed her ladyship, with a vivid realisation of the recent scene.

Geraldine gave her friend a grateful look.

"Tell me, darling," said Walter, anxiously, "how did the Earl get your ring to copy from?"

"I do not know," was the puzzled reply. "I have been trying to think all day, but I cannot decide. The night before last I fell asleep, just after dinner, in the drawing-room. It was a strange thing for me to do. Perhaps he took my ring then. It was the only opportunity he could have had!"

"Could he have drugged you for the purpose of removing your ring, my dear?" asked Lady Rosenberg.

Geraldine started at the suggestion, and exclaimed,—

"Oh, Lady Rosenberg, do you think he would be guilty of such an act?"

"I think he would do a great many things to carry out his plans, my dear?"

"He might have drugged me," she said, thoughtfully. "Certainly, my sleep at that hour of the day, and in that place, seem unaccountable."

"Geraldine," said Walter, "did you receive either of the letters I wrote you since my return to town?"

She replied in the negative.

"Yet the Countess assured me that you had received the first one! The remark shows that she must have been a party to this deception!"

"And yet she has been very kind and sympathising with me until this afternoon!"

"I do not like to judge any one hastily," remarked Lady Rosenberg, "but I do not like Lady Montford. When I called for you last evening, Geraldine, she seemed altogether too affectionate in her manner towards you for so brief an acquaintance. Be on your guard against her, my child. But," she added, arising, "I will leave you a little while to your explanations, as I wish to see Raymond."

She withdrew, leaving the lovers to indulge in the tender converse in which they were too timid to engage even before her.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Cancel his bond of life dear God, I pray,
That I may live to say—the dog is dead.

—Shakespeare.

LADY ROSENBERY was absent from the boudoir nearly an hour, and during that time she had conversed with Raymond, who had apologised to her for his late insulting remarks, but was abruptly refused to make a similar concession to Walter. He seemed to think that, under the present state of circumstances, the artist would pay very few visits to Rosenberg House, and there was nothing he so much desired as to bring about a rupture of the friendship existing between mother and son.

Had he possessed but a little more cunning he would have seen that his present conduct could only serve to bind them the more closely together.

At length, pale and wearied with her successful efforts to bring Rosenberg into a different frame of mind, her ladyship returned to the lovers, and derived comfort and pleasure from the sight of their innocent happiness.

"How long you have been absent, dear Lady Rosenberg!" exclaimed Walter, who had been entertaining some anxiety in regard to her interview with Rosenberg.

"What! You have missed me when Geraldine was with you?" said her ladyship, with a smile.

"We have both missed you!" remarked the maiden, blushing. "We want your advice about—about our future."

Her ladyship seated herself beside the young couple, and begged them to state the points upon which they desired counsel.

"It is in regard to our marriage," declared Walter. "I am anxious to remove Geraldine from her present home. The Earl has proved himself an active enemy to our interests, and I have no faith in the friendship of the Italian for Geraldine. We have been talking over the matter, and I have been urging to consent to a speedy marriage; but she objects, and has finally agreed to abide by your decision."

Lady Rosenberg looked thoughtful, and remained silent.

"I cannot feel that she is safe with the Earl and Countess," continued Walter. "Do you not think, dear Lady Rosenberg, that we had better be married quietly, and go abroad until the Earl gets over his first anger?"

"What does Geraldine say?" asked her ladyship.

"I do not like a stolen marriage," she replied. "I should prefer to wait a little longer, until I become perfectly sure that my uncle will never relent. He is my guardian, and my father loved him tenderly. I owe him a reasonable obedience, and though I shall marry Walter, yet I do not know but that, by a brief exercise of patience, I may gain my uncle's consent!"

"Geraldine is right, Walter," said Lady Rosenberg. "A little longer waiting can do no harm, and may bring you both much good. You are both proof against future schemes for breaking your faith in each other, and the Earl will not dare to resort to violent and coercive measures. When he sees that his designs are hopeless, he may relax his opposition. Geraldine is his niece, the only child of his only brother, and he certainly must cherish some affection for her. I advise you to wait a little."

A shadow of anxiety crossed Walter's face, but he made no reply.

"I have other reasons for my advice," continued her ladyship. "I am thoughtful of Walter's reputation. Should you contract a private marriage, the world would say that Walter was a fortune-hunter, or that you, Geraldine, were infatuated with him, or ashamed of your choice. Of course, you could afford to laugh at what the world said; nevertheless, if disagreeable remarks can be avoided by the exercise of a little patience, it would be well to avoid them."

"You are right, dear Lady Rosenberg—as you always are," responded Walter, his look of disappointment vanishing.

"As to Geraldine's home," resumed her ladyship, "it will be easy for her to avoid unfriendly-relatives. By the way, my dear," she added, "is not this a very singular marriage of the Earl's? We never saw his bride in society, and he has so often declared himself a confirmed bachelor that it is a universal surprise to learn that he is at last married!"

"I believe he loved his present wife years ago, long before he came home from his travels," Geraldine replied. "She is an Italian, you know, and has been faithful to him all these years. The fact of her long faithfulness made me regard her with sympathy?"

"Then, if she is devoted to him she will heartily be devoted to you, my dear," said Lady Rosenberg. "You both think, then, you will wait a little longer?"

The lovers assented.

"But shall we never meet except as strangers?" demanded Walter. "I am forbidden the Earl's house, my letters are intercepted, and I shall never know when Geraldine is well or ill!"

"As betrothed lovers there can be no harm in your meeting," observed her ladyship. "Since Geraldine has no home of her own in which to receive you mine is at her service."

Even the censorious world can find nothing to blame in your meeting at my house."

Walter was overjoyed at this arrangement, and Lady Geraldine, who placed implicit confidence in her friend, thanked her for her thoughtful kindness.

"Such meetings will not be so long required," said Lady Rosenbury. "After a reasonable period of waiting, should the Earl persist in his opposition to your marriage, you can have a quiet wedding, and I will give your wedding breakfast. I simply counsel a resort to mild measures first!"

Her ladyship's advice commended itself to the sense of the lovers, and they cheerfully acquiesced in her decision.

She was proceeding to give them more elaborate counsel when the door opened, and Lord Rosenbury again made his appearance.

There was about him no trace of his late anger. On the contrary, his manner was suave and bland, and his countenance wreathed in smiles.

He had just learned of the presence of Lady Geraldine.

He advanced into the boudoir, greeted the maiden very politely and cordially, bowed coldly to Walter, thus completely ignoring their late episode, and seated himself quietly near Lady Rosenbury.

A silent embarrassment fell upon the little group.

"Don't let me interrupt your conversation," remarked his lordship, with barely perceptible chagrin. "I am glad to see you looking so well to-day, Lady Geraldine. I thought you looked a trifle anxious last evening, and rather pale, too—that is, during the early part of the evening!"

The colour that now vivified the maiden's clear olive cheeks seemed to make amends for the late paleness to which he alluded.

Rosenbury glanced from one to another of the little group and his keen glances seemed to recognise the relations that had now become firmly established between the young couple.

They sat near each other, and he observed that at his entrance they had unlapsed hands. There was a proud, protecting tone in Walter's manner towards his betrothed, and she exhibited a gentle dependence upon him, while there was a mutual deference that marked them as lovers.

Rosenbury bit his lips with chagrin.

He had been very angry at Walter the previous evening for appearing in the Rosenbury box at the theatre and monopolising the attention of Geraldine, and that anger had now increased to positive hatred, not unmingled with fear.

Walter had gained the love of Lady Rosenbury and Lady Geraldine, and might be not end by regaining his usurped rank and honours?

Alarmed at the position in which he found himself in the esteem of these two ladies, Rosenbury exerted himself to be agreeable and fascinating, in order, if possible, to awaken the pride of the one and the affection of the other.

In the midst of an elaborate speech, a knock sounded upon the door, and a liveried servant entered the room.

"If you please, my lord," he said, addressing Rosenbury, "a person wishes to see your lordship."

Rosenbury turned around with a scowl that caused the footman to pause instinctively.

Without deigning a word to the servant, his lordship waved his hand imperiously as a signal to him to be gone.

"But, if you please, my lord," persisted the footman, in a trembling tone, "your lordship gave orders as the person was always to be admitted—"

Rosenbury made an imperative gesture, before which the man retreated.

But before he could close the door, or indeed quite reach it, the "person" to whom he referred entered the boudoir with a swaggering air.

He had followed the servant to whom he had stated his wishes.

As the reader probably guesses, the "person" was Colte Lorraine.

His personal appearance was decidedly convivial, his hat being as usual, upon the back of his head, one eye being screwed closely, while the other beamed with a decidedly jolly expression, and his red necktie streaming across his chest, the heat rendering it uncomfortable when properly adjusted. In other respects, his attire was quite fashionable and his jewellery was good.

As he elbowed himself past the servant the latter seized the opportunity of gliding from the room, in the hope of escaping his master's wrath.

"Can't see me, my lord?" ejaculated Lorraine, with a beaming smile. "How do? How do?"

Lord Rosenbury and Walter simultaneously arose.

The thought of the latter was that his supposed father had followed him to the mansion of the Rosenburys, and his first impulse was to get him away quietly before he should have disgusted or annoyed Lady Geraldine.

"Come away, father," he said, advancing towards him. "Come home with me!"

"Wal'er here!" exclaimed Lorraine, holding out his hand. "Glad see you. Pleasant but expected meeting! Hope see you well, Wal'er. B'liged invitation, but really can't 'cept!"

He paused, looked around, touched his forehead to Lady Rosenbury and Lady Geraldine, and then said,—

"Girl make up, eh, Wal'er? Greatest grief my life 'cause I made her mad that time lookin' at picture. But all right now, eh? Feel 'self again. Wal'er's treasure, young lady," he added, addressing the maiden. "Wal'er's good 't me, good everybody, though pictures nowhere 'ordin' rules art."

Geraldine could not help smiling at this opinion, delivered to with such a dictatorial air.

"Come, father," repeated Walter.

"Mus' 'fuse, my son. 'Nother time. To-day came to see my lud. Seems to me ludehip rather cool!"

He made the remark with such a suspiciousness in his manner that Rosenbury, concealing his annoyance, replied with great apparent condescension:

"Not at all, my good fellow—"

"F't'a, F't'a!" interrupted Lorraine. "Not a f't'a! Am a gen'l'man!"

"Very well, Mr. Lorraine," said Rosenbury, forcing a smile. "You came, I suppose, to me about the advancement of your son? You have been here once before with the same object."

Lorraine looked surprised, then meditative, and then burst into a sudden laugh, winked at Rosenbury in what is popularly called a "knowing" manner, and said,—

"Very good, ludehip. Come see 'bout son's 'vancement! Like private 'view!"

"Not on my account," said Walter, haughtily. "I desire no advancement that I cannot gain for myself."

Lorraine's countenance fell, and he looked disconcerted at this remark. Brightening up, however, at the remembrance of the brilliant specimen he had just received of Rosenbury's capabilities of invention, he looked inquiringly at his lordship.

"Your pride may tempt you to refuse my kind offices, Mr. Lorraine," observed Rosenbury; "but I cannot so soon forget my promise to your dying mother. I will therefore listen to what your father has to say!"

Lorraine glanced triumphantly at Walter.

"Thank you," replied the artist, coldly. "I will absolve your lordship from the promise to which you allude. I positively decline accepting any favour whatever at your hands!"

Lorraine's countenance fell again.

"Well, do as you like," said Rosenbury, nervously. "As I promised to see your father

again on the subject, however, I will do so. Be kind enough, Mr. Lorraine," he said, addressing the former gardener, "to proceed to the reception-room at the end of the hall. I will see you as soon as I have leisure!"

Lorraine smiled, winked expressively at his lordship, abruptly changed his expression to one of great solemnity as he encountered the glances of the ladies and Walter, and retreated from the apartment.

The artist made no further attempt to prevent an interview between Lorraine and Rosenbury—indeed, he made no further allusion to Lorraine's visit.

Envy the ease with which Walter dismissed the subject, and annoyed that the appearance of Lorraine had made no difference in the manner of the ladies towards the artist, Rosenbury assumed an air of condescension towards him, but it was not even noticed by its object.

The ladies both noticed it, however, and Rosenbury fell to a still lower position in their esteem.

After half-an-hour's talk his lordship arose, declared that the sooner his disagreeable task was over the better, and with a bow and a smile left the boudoir, hastening to the reception-room.

Once there and alone in the presence of Colte Lorraine, his countenance changed with startling rapidity.

"What do you mean, you scoundrel?" he exclaimed, catching his smiling parent by the arm. "How dare you come again so soon to see me? Why did you not write if you wanted anything? I've a good mind to have you kicked into the street."

"Better not, Raymon," said Lorraine, somewhat sobered by his son's gust of passion. "Better treat me better. Remember, I'm your father!"

"Hush! Walls have ears," said Rosenbury, more coolly. "Just explain why you come here to-day! Didn't you promise to stay away?"

"Well, what if I did?" whined Lorraine. "You don't make 'allowance for paternal 'fection—"

"Stuff!"

"I could live here all time if I wanted to!" declared Lorraine, plucking up courage.

"Tell me what you want!"

"I say Raymon, you's tended for business f't'a! What I want's this. Weather's 'ot, lodgin's 'ncomfortable. Want invitation to Rose'bu'y."

"But you know I can't invite you there without exciting suspicion," said Rosenbury, the perspiration breaking out on his forehead at the thought. "If you are going to intrude upon me in this manner, coming here to see me, and demanding to visit Rosenbury, you may as well give up all hope of ever getting any more money from me. The secret will leak out, I shall be kicked out of my position, and you will be transported for life!"

Lorraine was startled at this picture.

"True," he muttered. "Was foolish. Don't want lose money, nor don't want be transported. I'll be careful, Raymon. I won't come again, present."

"London is warm now," said Rosenbury, in a conciliating tone. "Why don't you go off somewhere? Suppose you travel. I'll give you plenty of money. You might visit Paris—"

But Paris is hot too," interrupted Lorraine, with melancholy. "Like to travel well 'nough in own country, but ain't goin' round foreign ones, where don't know language!"

"Why not return to Australia?"

"Too far off! Paternal feelin's mus' be 'sidered!"

Rosenbury bit his lips.

"Tell you what I'll do!" said Lorraine, convinced that he had gained a brilliant idea. "I'll travel over own country—'Nited Kingdom. Like know something manners an' customs of own people. Give me plenty money, Raymon, an' I'll start to-morrow!"

Devoutly hoping that some of the many

accidents to which travellers by rail or steam are liable might put an end to his troublesome father's existence, Rosenbury hastened to bestow upon him a sum which he deemed adequate to his needs.

"Shall start in morning," remarked Loraine, as he proceeded to count the sum allotted him. "Money'll do. May be gone several months—'ll write if need more yellow boys. Don't look very well, Raymon'. Sorry to see poorly!"

"Oh, I am well enough, thank you. One of these days you shall live with me, just as you used to picture, but at present, out of consideration for what people will say, we had better not see each other. You see," added Rosenbury, with assumed kindness, "as long as Lady Rosenbury lives, we must be very guarded."

Loraine assented.

"Should you ever wish to see me you have only to drop me a note," continued his lordship. "Wherever you are I will come to see you. In that way we shall avoid all suspicion, and possess the Rosenbury estates to live upon! Of course, I shall always share what I have with you?"

Loraine was not imposed upon by the pretended friendliness of his son, but he was convinced by his arguments and quite alarmed at his late imprudence in visiting Rosenbury so openly.

He readily agreed to do as his son directed.

"An' now my goin's settled," he observed. "you'll be kin' to Wal'er, Ray'mon? Jes, think—he's the real Lu'd Rose'b'y an' you're, by rights, only my son. Think of the real Lu'd Rose'b'y a paintin' sixpenny pictures to sell. It's 'nough to make late ladship rise out of his tombston. Don't in'fere with Wal'er an' the girl, Ray'mon'. She's more fitter for him'n you!"

"Very well," responded Rosenbury, "And now, if you have nothing more to say to me you'd better go, or Wal'er and Lady Rosenbury may grow suspicious."

Loraine immediately arose, preparing to take his departure.

"Good-bye, my son," he said, with mandlin tenderness, clasping his hand. "Hope my little tower 'll do me good. 'll write often. Be kin' to Wal'er. Good-bye!"

He wrang his hand and departed, chuckling to himself at the thought of Rosenbury's feigned kindness and evident anxiety to get rid of him by sending him abroad, while Rosenbury returned to his mother's guests.

CHAPTER XXIX.

I have almost forgot the taste of fears;
The time has been, my sense would have cool'd
To hear a night shriek; and my fell of hair
Would at a dismal treatise rouse, and stir
As life were in it; I have sup'd full of horrors;
Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,
Cannot once start me.

—Macbeth.

The strange fugitive, whose singular acquaintance with Walter Loraine at Rock Land has been chronicled, lay upon the deck of the yacht as it passed out of the little cove, his haggard, despairing face upturned to the brilliant heavens. He uttered no groans, no prayers for relief or mercy. His late wild struggles had entirely ceased, and he prepared to have become utterly despairing or apathetic. The Norwegian seamen moved about him, sometimes roughly pushing him aside, and his two captors paced the deck arm-in-arm, occasionally pausing beside him to express their villainous joy at his capture, or utter terrible threats as to the treatment he would soon receive.

The captive heard their threats apparently unmoved. His eyes did not blench, not a muscle quivered, not a word escaped his lips. He might have seemed carved from stone had it not been for the irregular heaving of his breast.

The agony of an utter despair chilled and deadened his soul.

His mind reverted to his late wild freedom upon the shores of Rock Land, to the kindness and sympathy of the young artist, to his late hopes and plans.

When the yacht had nearly passed out of view of the shore she was headed northward, and proceeded in that direction at a fair rate of speed, the breeze being in her favour.

The two brothers, who had captured the fugitive, at length paused beside him, and one of them said,—

"Suppose we have him taken down into the cabin, doctor?"

The "doctor," the elder brother, a tall, thin man, with a cadaverous countenance, on which was an expression of grasping avarice—an expression which was habitual to him—laughed, as he answered,—

"Let him be! If he catches cold so much the better, I shall be glad when he dies, and ends his attempts at escape!"

The younger man shook his head, saying,—

"You forget, doctor, that when this man dies our annuities die with him. It is our interest to keep him alive!"

"Hush!" replied the doctor. "He'll hear you."

"What if he does?" was the response.

"Do you think he'd know enough to kill himself to deprive us of our annuities?"

The doctor silently pointed to the face of the captive, over which a slight change had suddenly passed. He then took his brother's arm again, which he had let fall, and led him to the opposite side of the boat, when he said,—

"Alive or dead, this captive is a fortune to us. The 'annuities,' to which you so often allude can be doubled any day I desire it."

"How so?" interrupted the younger man.

"I will tell you. To make you understand the case, it may be well to recount a few of the circumstances of our connection with it. You and I have kept for many years a licensed retreat for the 'mentally disabled,' as we termed the candidates for our asylum—you being the steward and active manager of the establishment, and I having charge of the medical department. You know nothing whatever of medicine, and very little of the symptoms of insanity, and have never troubled yourself about our patients, while I was educated to be a physician."

"Well, what of all this?" demanded the younger brother, as the doctor paused.

"Simply this: in our establishment there has been but one person to judge of the sanity of its inmates. Sometimes that person, myself, has judged wrongly. By the way, Caleb, do you remember about what time this person made his appearance at Mure Hall?"

"Well, no!"

"I do. It was immediately after that case of ours in the police courts, that made such a stir. I mean that case of Mr. Crosse, the rich young gentleman, who was no more insane than you or I, but who was placed in our establishment by his guardian, who wanted his fortune. You remember he managed to escape, and made us a good deal of trouble, as well as caused his guardian to flee the country. It was while the commotion he caused was subsiding that a gentleman brought this person to us, stating his name to be John Smith, and his rank merely that of a gentleman of moderate fortune. He stated him to be a relative of a gentleman of high rank, and that the mania of Smith was that he himself was the nobleman, but that he had been illegally deprived of rank and fortune!"

"I remember, doctor. The story of Smith was plainly preposterous."

The doctor smiled complacently and pityingly at his brother, and proceeded,—

"So I thought once. It certainly looks improbable—too improbable for fiction! The name of Smith would certainly be the first to occur to anyone who wanted an assumed name, either for himself or another. Then, again,

this patient of ours looks, or did look, like a nobleman used to every luxury. Besides, he does not act like an insane person. In short, I believe him to be sane!"

"Why, then," exclaimed Caleb, with an air of astonishment, "if he is sane, his story must be true!"

"Exactly so!"

"How long have you suspected him to be sane?"

"Oh, a long time," replied the doctor, with a shrewd look. "I should have suspected it from the first had not his story been so incredible!"

"But if his story be true, doctor, would we not make more money by setting him free and helping him to regain his rights?"

The doctor shook his head.

"I have considered that idea," he said, "but it is not available. We can get all we desire from his enemy. If we were to set him free it would come out how we had treated him for years, and how we had treated other patients. No—to keep ourselves out of trouble, and to fill our pockets handsomely, we must look to the person who has usurped his place!"

The younger brother assented.

"Strange, doctor," he said, "that Smith should have come to this particular spot of all England? Don't you think so?"

"Hardly. It was a lonely spot, where he could not easily be found. Besides, it seems that he made his way from the Hall by the coast, never plunging in the country, for fear of being taken. I am particularly anxious to discover where he got his present clothing, and whether he communicated his story to any one."

"He probably took the clothes, doctor, without leave; and as to his story, why, if he deceived you in regard to his sanity, he would deceive any one. He looks insane, if ever a man looked so."

"Still," responded the doctor, "I shall make a search of his clothing, to see if there is not about him some clue as to their ownership. If they were given to him, he probably got money at the same time. In that case, I shall of course take care of it!" And he smiled. "Besides," he added, "I have too much confidence in that new attendant of ours. I believe he could be bribed with a guinea to let every patient we have got loose!"

"Still, he has always been faithful," responded Caleb, reflectively. "I think you are mistaken in your estimate of him."

"I shall keep a sharp eye on him," said the doctor. "Works has been faithful so far, because it's been his interest to be so. He's simple-minded, and believes our patients to be really insane. So they all are, except Smith!"

"Well, let's examine Smith's clothing for money now," said Caleb. "I am sure no one would give him any, but we can look."

The latter part of this conversation had been overheard by its subject, the speakers having approached to within a short distance of him, and leaned against the bulwarks, looking upon the sea while they talked.

At the mention of a search of his person for money his countenance had changed expression; he had moved uneasily, and aroused himself to a full realisation of his position.

He suddenly remembered that he still had in his possession the purse of money given him by Walter Loraine. The thought flashed upon him, like a sudden thrill of hope, that the contents of this purse might yet purchase for him a way of escape from his captors, and he determined to retain it if possible.

While his captors were still conversing he gently moved his manacled hands to his breast, where, in an inside pocket of his coat, the purse was hidden, and drew it forth, keeping it under his coat.

His first idea was to slip it into one of his shoes, but he foresaw that discovery would be inevitable if he kept it upon his person, and particularly in one of his shoes, and he looked about him for a place of concealment.

The deck of the yacht was cleanly swept, and, with the exception of a few coils of rope, afforded no hiding place for his treasure.

Fortunately, or providentially, however, one of these coils of rope was very near him, so near that his head touched it, and he resolved to secrete the money somewhere about it.

The task required the utmost care to prevent the rattling of chains, but the prisoner gently moved his hands containing the money above his head, and dropped the purse. It made no sound in falling, and he concluded, with a sigh of relief, that it had slipped between the heavy coils.

It had, in fact, fallen in such a manner as to be not easily discoverable.

Then cautiously returning his hands to their former position, the prisoner quietly awaited the proposed search.

Immediately after the last remark by the doctor's brother the two men advanced from the bulwarks, and the elder of them said,—

"Since you won't tell us, Smith, where you got those fine clothes you're wearing, suppose you let us know how much money you have?"

"You will have to look for yourself, Dr. Mure," replied the prisoner, with a quiet self-possession that greatly irritated his captors.

"We will do so!" declared the doctor, roughly. "Here, Caleb, give me your assistance."

The two men proceeded to search the prisoner, in which undertaking they met with no opposition. The breast-pocket, where the purse had so lately reposed, was thoroughly explored, the coat itself was pricked here and there with the doctor's pocket-knife, and even the shoes were examined, but all to no effect.

"Well, it's just as I said, doctor," remarked the younger brother, when they had finished; "he stole the clothes! We might have spared ourselves all this trouble. Who should give him money?"

"Still, I am puzzled," declared the doctor. "People who steal don't usually stop to comb their hair and make an elaborate toilet. But whatever the mystery, it is clear that he has no money."

With this decision, the doctor and his brother resumed their walk.

Convinced that his person was safe from further examination, the prisoner began to consider how he should regain possession of the purse.

It would be impossible to reach it in his present position with his manacled hands, and he began to struggle to a sitting position.

He soon succeeded in his effort to sit upright, but made no motion toward the coil of rope for some time, until his change of position had ceased to attract the notice of his captors.

And then he moved his hands forward, and sent his long, thin fingers on exploring expeditions among the crevices between the coils of the rope.

He was soon successful, finding the purse, and he then cautiously restored it to the depths of his breast pocket.

"I may never escape," he thought gloomily, "but I will, at least, keep the purse as a memento of the noble youth who so kindly befriended me. Perhaps some time it may be of use to me. Providence cannot have utterly forsaken me!"

He leaned back against the rope and looked up at the sky, with a wild prayer in his eyes.

But the moonlight and the glitter of the stars seemed to mock his entreaties, and his despair was increased tenfold.

And yet not a murmur escaped his lips.

The brothers continued to walk to and fro, occasionally pausing to speak to one of the seamen in his own tongue, or look through a night-glass at the dim light of the coast, but their attention did not again revert to their prisoner.

"I say, doctor," said Caleb, thoughtfully, "I think you're mistaken in your treatment of Smith, if you believe his story to be true. Suppose he is really the nobleman he declares

himself to be, and the nobleman who bears his title is an usurper or impostor, why, then, it's your interest to keep him alive! As long as he lives, you have a hold upon his enemy! When he dies you lose that hold. Suppose he were dead, how could you prove his statements?"

"There is something in what you say," replied the doctor, in a somewhat disturbed tone.

"And that is not all," declared the younger brother, with a triumphant air. "If Smith dies, the usurper becomes the rightful possessor of the titles and estates of which Smith has been defrauded!"

"True, true!" exclaimed the doctor. "I never thought of that! What a dolt I have been! Your words, Caleb, have shown me my mistake. Smith must be guarded as a priceless treasure, at least until you and I have made our fortunes and are ready to leave England. Then I don't care what becomes of him!"

Acting upon this motive of self-interest, Dr. Mure ordered a couple of the seamen to carry the prisoner into the little cabin, which order was obeyed. They laid the captive upon a low divan at one side of the tiny room, and one of the seamen, from a humane impulse, put a cushion under his head.

They then withdrew, leaving him alone. The cabin was far less pleasant than the deck to the prisoner, it being warm and close.

The light came through a skylight, and through the same medium he beheld the stars, which seemed now farther off than ever.

The hours wore on, and still with unflinching gaze he gazed through the skylight at the stars; still there came the unsteady tramp to and fro on the deck of Doctor Mure and his brother; and still the seamen attended to their labours in almost total silence.

But at length there came a change.

The starlight paled before the grey twilight of the early morning, and, at no great distance, was seen the rocky coast against which beat the white waves of the sea.

"Well we're almost home!" said the doctor, with a long breath of relief. "I have slept very little since we began our search for Smith, and am as hungry as tired!"

The seamen received no instructions from their employers, but headed the yacht inland, and soon anchored her in a secluded little cove.

They then got out the small boat, deposited their prisoner in it, the captors followed, and two of the seamen rowed to a narrow strip of beach where they all landed.

As he sprang out upon the sand, Dr. Mure gave some directions in regard to the yacht, which proclaimed him to be its owner, and the seamen his employés.

In fact, he had a great love for the sea, and was wont to gratify it by frequent little excursions about the coast in his tiny craft—this being the only recreation he ever allowed himself.

After concluding his directions, the doctor turned his gaze inland, and his keen eye soon observed a horse and waggon rapidly advancing along a dusty road that led to their landing-place.

"Cramp is punctual!" he observed. "Lift out the patient, Caleb!"

The prisoner was removed from the boat to the land, and the seamen rowed back to the yacht.

They had hardly vanished from the shore when the horse and waggon drove up, halting at a short distance from the little group.

The driver was alone, and he immediately sprang out, and touched his hat to Dr. Mure.

He was a man of heroic frame with a countenance that had in it more of the animal than the human.

"Just in time, Cramp!" said the doctor. "Were you here yesterday morning?"

"Yes, sir. I've been here every mornin' at time, 'ordin to your orders, sir. You said you might come back any mornin', an' I was to be here to meet you. So you found Smith, sir?"

"Yes, I found him, and hard work I had to do it, too," declared the doctor. "Put him into the waggon, Cramp, and we'll off."

Cramp obeyed, lifting the thin form of the prisoner as though it had been that of a child, and depositing him in the waggon.

The waggon contained a shawl or two, and one of these the doctor wrapped about the captive in such a manner as to entirely conceal his chains.

Cramp then mounted to his seat, the brothers seated themselves one on each side of their prisoner, and the party set off, at a moderate pace, along the road which conducted into the country.

CHAPTER XXX.

Abandon hope, all ye who enter here.

—Dante.

MURE HALL, the residence of Dr. Mure and his brother, stood a short distance from the sea-coast, in a desolate and thinly-settled region.

It was a large and rambling edifice, built of stone, and two stories in height, and possessed a wing of more modern architecture. The tall chimneys, the many gables, the dormer windows, the narrow doors, all proclaimed the age of the main structure. The wing possessed no doors opening upon the grounds, and its windows were small square apertures, evidently near the ceilings of the rooms to which they were intended to furnish light. These windows were provided with narrow iron bars, painted white, which were not perceptible from the grounds.

The hall was surrounded by a profuse growth of gloomy trees, which grew close to the building, shading it completely from view. Outside this circle of foliage was a green lawn, sprinkled with clumps of trees, and having in its centre a small fountain. This lawn was protected by a high stone wall, and was used by the patients of the establishment in their daily exercise. A few flowers gave it brightness, and rendered it an attractive feature to the friends of the inmates.

In the rear of the hall flourished a vegetable garden, where none of the patients were allowed to walk, it being shut in only by a simple hedge of ordinary height.

A few fields behind the garden belonged to the hall, and furnished cereals for the consumption of the doctor's large family.

On one side of these fields stretched a barren, rocky shore; on the other fertile meadows, and still further inland, at a distance of a few miles, villages and towns.

The estate, which, under its present tenant, was called Mure Hall, was quite small, and belonged to a wealthy nobleman, who knew very little of the doctor, but who was very well pleased with his prompt payments and improvements of the place.

Within the mansion was presented a strong contrast to the pleasant lawn. There was a prison look about the bare, uncarpeted halls, and particularly about the doors opening from them, these doors being each provided with an open panel, closely grated, through which the keeper could survey the occupant of the room.

None but male patients were admitted to the hall, and these all had greater or less idiosyncracies, many of them being harmless and gentle. To these latter, Mrs. Mure, the housekeeper, and wife of Caleb Mure, the manager, was uniformly kind, and she managed to mitigate the severity of their lot by the pleasures of the table and by her sympathising manner. These harmless patients, many of whom recovered under the skill of the doctor and the kindness of his brother's wife, and were then sent home, occupied the main building. The more violent inmates, or those whom it was deemed necessary to guard more closely and keep entirely secluded, were kept confined in the wing, where Mrs. Mure was never allowed to make her appearance.

The staff of servants was moderately large, the establishment paying its proprietors handsomely, and its present reputation was very good, the inspectors having reported more than once very favourably of the remarkably humane treatment accorded to its inmates.

But, then, they had never been behind the scenes!

Dr. Mure, it was true, wore a velvet glove, but it concealed a hand of iron. Some of the patients never discovered him to be other than gentle, and these were loud in his praise to visitors; but to others he was an incarnation of cruelty. Among these latter was the strange fugitive who had appealed to Walter Lorraine.

The sun had not fully arisen when the waggon, containing the prisoner and his captors, turned into the grounds belonging to the hall; but, early as was the hour, there were two or three wild-looking, sleepless faces pressed against the painted gratings to catch a glimpse of the new arrival. The thick foliage of the trees prevented their success, however, and the next minute the waggon stopped before the front door.

Cramp sprang out and sounded the massive iron knocker, and then returned to assist the prisoner from his seat.

The knock was speedily answered by the appearance of a keeper, who hastened to aid Cramp with the captive.

"So you've got him, doctor?" exclaimed the keeper, in a tone of satisfaction. "We'll soon teach him to run away."

"Stop, Horley! No violence!" commanded the doctor. "Smith must be taken care of—good care of—mind you!"

Horley arched his brows in surprise, but a glance at the doctor assured him that the order was to be obeyed, and his movements instantly became more gentle.

The position of the late fugitive at Mure Hall had always been unbearable. He had been the scapegoat of the establishment, the butt of every keeper's ill-humours, and the particular object of the doctor's cruelties and harshness.

It seemed strange, therefore, that "good care" was henceforth to be taken of him.

He was assisted into the house by Cramp and Horley, preceded by the doctor, and followed by the manager. Thus guarded, he was conducted into a waiting-room at one side of the corridor, and placed upon a seat.

"How do affairs get on, Horley?" asked the doctor, when Cramp had disappeared, and the younger Mure had departed to announce his arrival to his wife. "Have things gone all right during my absence?"

"All right, sir. But we expected you back before this time, sir. I've sent Cramp every morning to the coast to look for you, as you directed—"

"Very good, Horley. The patients are all as well as usual?"

"Yes, sir. Number Five is recovering, sir—hasn't had any attack since you went away."

"I'll write to his friends to-day, then. He has quite recovered. The corner room in the wing is not occupied?"

Horley replied in the negative.

"Prepare it, then, for Smith, and see that he is got into it immediately. As you go up to attend to it give the order for my breakfast. At the same time, order a breakfast for the three seamen, who will be here directly, and then send them to fish. They ought to be able to take something handsome to market this week!"

Horley bowed and withdrew.

The doctor took a few turns about the room, looked at his watch, gazed from the window, and then went into a little room adjoining, which seemed to be a sort of laboratory, and contained shelves laden with bottles of medicines.

The moment he was left alone the dull look vanished from the prisoner's face, and was succeeded by one of the keenest despair.

The sight of those familiar walls seemed to

arouse him from his unnatural apathy, and his breast heaved convulsively, and he tugged at his handcuffs, vainly endeavouring to pass them over his hands.

"This is the last chance I shall ever have to escape," he thought, looking around the room, and at the door leading into the hall. "If I could only free myself now I know I could get away. I know I could!"

He stooped and pulled frantically at the gyves that held his feet close together in an iron clasp, but his scanty strength was but wasted upon them.

Realising at length the futility of his efforts he ceased, dropped his feet to the floor with a sudden nervelessness, so that the chains rattled, and letting his head fall upon his breast, he gave way to tears.

He had not a long time to indulge in this luxury, for he heard the approaching footsteps of Horley. He had scarcely wiped his eyes upon his coat-sleeve, and resumed his impassive demeanour, when the keeper appeared, and asked,—

"Where's the doctor?"

The prisoner made no reply.

"In a sulky fit, eh?" said Horley, advancing.

"You answer, or I'll—"

"No violence, Horley," said the doctor, in his usual silky tones, appearing in the doorway connecting the waiting room with the laboratory. "Remember, you are to treat Smith with kindness!"

Horley bowed, with an air of chagrin, and replied,—

"The end-room is ready, sir, and I've come to take Smith to it."

"Just loosen his anklets a little, Horley," commanded the doctor, "and let him walk beside you!"

The chain which connected the anklets had been shortened in order to bring the feet close together, and Horley now loosened the chain so that the prisoner could walk without much difficulty.

Then taking his arm, Horley conducted him from the room, along a carpeted corridor, up a flight of handsome stairs, and on towards the wing, the chain clanking after them as they proceeded.

The wing was composed of a simple corridor lined on each side by small rooms; and as the captive and his keeper proceeded along this bare corridor, the noise made by the chain drew to the open panels of the doors several wild-looking faces, and the new-comer was greeted with derisive shouts and exclamations of pity.

The "end-room" was soon reached, the prisoner thrust inside, the door locked upon him, and he had again taken his place among the maniacs as one of them.

The room in which he now found himself was one he had never before occupied, and he gave a momentary glance, with what wild hope it is unnecessary to state.

There was but a single window, and this, like the others in the wing, was very high up, quite beyond the reach of a man of ordinary height. The floor was uncarpeted, and the furniture very simple—consisting of a low bed in one corner made upon a pile of mattresses, a couple of cushions to sit upon, and a wash-stand. The walls were of some hard wood, through which it would be impossible to cut had a knife been at hand for the purpose.

The prisoner tottered across the floor, his chain clanking at his heels, and sank down upon the little bed.

"If I had only told my story to Walter Lorraine!" he moaned, in an inaudible tone. "If I had only told him the place of my long imprisonment! Perhaps he might have rescued me! But I am now buried alive!"

The tears he had checked when in the waiting room burst forth again, and he gave way to a wild burst of weeping, sobbing forth his anguish in a way that would have softened the hardest heart, could it have been witnessed.

(To be continued.)

A GREAT COST.

CHAPTER XXV.

LADY BRIDGEWORTH was shown into a bright, cheery morning-room. Early as the hour was Lady Castleton was more than prepared for her guest.

She rose from her chair, a charming, dainty little old lady, in her loose gown of violet cashmere and cap and frills of soft creamy lace.

"This is more than kind, Lady Bridgeworth!" she said, advancing on her silver-headed stick and stretching out her small white hand.

"I came at once," Josephine knew the woman she had to deal with. "I was just dressing when my maid came in with the information that Barbara was not in her room. I had not time to grow alarmed when your note reached me. I could not believe my ears when my maid began to reiterate that the child was gone."

There was just the requisite touch of annoyance in Lady Bridgeworth's tone. She spoke like a well-bred woman who was more vexed than alarmed over Barbara's strange conduct.

Lady Castleton read her manner just as she desired the older woman should.

"Child is the right name to give her," she said, quickly and with a tenderness coming into her clear, sharp voice. "You must let me beg you to forgive her for occasioning you so much anxiety, Lady Bridgeworth. She acted foolishly, but children cannot be expected to have very wise heads."

Josephine loosened her sealskin, and sat back in her chair.

"All is well that ends well," she said with her cold smile, "and in this case all seems to have ended marvellously well for Barbara. Your letter gave me immense surprise, Lady Castleton, as no doubt you can understand."

"Yes, the matter is a surprising one. But to me at least it has other surroundings." Lady Castleton paused a moment. "Barbara is the child of my daughter Margaret, whom you, in common with the rest of the world, have heard little or nothing about. I have been hunting for her children for many years—ever since her death, in fact—but have never been able to trace a single clue. At times I have had a glimmer of hope, but it has always vanished, leaving nothing behind but despair and regret; and now—the old lady's handsome face was transformed with delight—"now at last I can hold my beloved Margaret's child in my arms!"

"But"—Josephine looked her curiosity and bewilderment—"but—this is all very sudden, very strange. Barbara said nothing to—"

"She has known nothing until yesterday," was Lady Castleton's reply given promptly. "It was Bertie who brought out the truth."

"And you are assured—you have proofs?" Josephine was growing less uncomfortable. She saw that whatever else might be on Lady Castleton's mind she at least was not connected with it.

"The matter is once again in my lawyer's hands. With Barbara to help us we shall soon have the whole of her history. For me, however, I need no other proof than her face. Her mother lives in her again. It is my Margaret restored to me."

"It is wonderful—wonderful!" Lady Bridgeworth murmured. She did not quite know what to say. She was hardly yet mistress of herself, and the news was indeed bewilderingly strange. "Poor little Barbara! Her lonely position has always been such a sorrow to her. She is so proud. I know she has suffered—"and then Josephine stopped, for a change had come over Lady Castleton's face.

"We will now leave the subject of her birth and family, which is settled—to come to the other question, Lady Bridgeworth. You are, of course, aware of why my grandchild felt

herself compelled to leave your house last night?"

"I am aware that she was in great trouble," Josephine said, quietly. "I left her in terrible distress, but," with a touch of that proud annoyance she felt, and felt wisely, would have most effect with Lady Castleton; "but as to the reason she should have left my house, Lady Castleton, I must confess I am absolutely ignorant. I am Barbara's friend, and, so far as I know, have given her no cause to treat me as she has done. It is hard that I should be called upon to share in the wrong of another."

Josephine spoke coldly, curtly, and Lady Castleton nodded her head.

"You have every right to be annoyed. The child must certainly should not have done what she did. But we agreed just now, did we not, that children will do foolish things, not without thinking? And this must be urged as an excuse in Barbara's case. She herself regretted almost at once the step she had taken as far as you were concerned, and begged me to give you her love, and ask you to forgive her."

"Am I not to see her?" Josephine asked this hurriedly.

Lady Castleton paused before she answered. "I think it will be better not, Lady Bridgeworth," she said, when she spoke. "The less said to her on this unpleasant subject the better, and naturally if she were to see you she would, of course, feel in duty bound to say something. I intend," Lady Castleton continued, her clear voice ringing out determinedly, "to remove her immediately from London. In fact, we start at noon for Coombe. The country air will do us all good, and she in particular."

Josephine was silent for a moment. She experienced a feeling of sudden, intense relief, but it was only a feeling, not a certainty. Nothing could be better than this hasty departure from town. It prevented any chance of Barbara and Mariel meeting, and Josephine knew that Mariel would rush down south as soon as possible. It prevented explanations. She drew a sudden, sharp breath.

"I am bewildered," she said, speaking hurriedly. "Everything seems to have changed. I confess to you, Lady Castleton, that I don't understand the situation in the least," she loosened her jacket a little more. "Do you think it wise Barbara should leave town? There is a mistake—there must be a mistake! I told her so last night. To me the whole thing seemed like a hoax—a mistake, as I say. It is not possible for Humphrey Lascelles to have behaved in such a way. You do not know him."

"I thank Heaven I do not, Lady Bridgeworth," was the firm, cold reply. "I have no desire to meet one whom I hold in the light of a villain—a scoundrel of the worst type!"

Josephine's lips were compressed. There was still enough of her old nature left to make her wince as she listened to this reproach of one whom she knew to be the soul of honour itself.

"There must be some explanation," she said again.

"Sir Humphrey Lascelles was sufficiently explanatory in the letter he sent my grandchild."

"She destroyed the letter," Josephine said, involuntarily.

Lady Castleton frowned; her face was very severe.

"It was a foolish act. But Barbara has told me herself, this morning, that she hardly knew what she did or said. In her mental agony she was not capable of doing that which an older or a more worldly person might have done. She repeated to me, however, the purport of the letter. She informs me you read it also, Lady Bridgeworth. Will you tell me if I have been correctly informed?"

Very slowly and clearly Lady Castleton enunciated the cruel, selfish, callous sentiments of the letter which Humphrey was supposed to have written.

"Can you confirm this?" she asked, as she paused.

Josephine bent her head.

"I am afraid I must; but—"

"The child was not inventing. There was a letter from Humphrey Lascelles last night written in these terms. It was not the imagination of her brain."

"There was certainly a letter, and," Josephine paused, effectively, "and written in such terms as you have repeated to me; but, Lady Castleton, I am—"

Lady Castleton very courteously interrupted her guest.

"I beg you will pardon me, Lady Bridgeworth, if I say that I cannot admit your plea of a possible mistake. Sir Humphrey Lascelles chose a most emphatic and satisfactory method of breaking responsibilities which his honour and his manhood demanded he should have held sacred to the end."

Josephine was silent a moment.

"I feel so powerless to say anything—to suggest any solution. I cannot believe this of Humphrey Lascelles."

"Your loyalty does you honour," the Countess said, with much dignity, "and I quite comprehend and sympathise with you in your dilemma. The position for you is painful and awkward; but it was as much for the purpose of, I hope, relieving you of this awkwardness, Lady Bridgeworth, that I asked you to be so kind as to come and see me this morning."

Josephine waited for the old lady to resume. The Countess had risen, and was walking to and fro quietly, leaning on her stick.

Her movements were a little hampered by her rheumatism, but still she was a graceful figure, with her upright carriage and proud head.

"One cannot serve Heaven and Mammon, you know, Lady Bridgeworth," she said, after a pause, "so it will be a much pleasanter arrangement if you feel that my grandchild resigns all claims to your friendship in favour of those who have a prior and a better right to it, and thus relieves you of what must be a very disagreeable position. Of course," Lady Castleton said, courteously, "of course Barbara's feelings towards you need never be changed, although in the future circumstances will keep you apart."

Josephine sat silent again, watching that small, dainty figure move to and fro.

"I think this would be certainly the wisest plan," she said very quietly. Inwardly she was chagrined beyond description—that she, Josephine Bridgeworth, should be treated thus by Barbara Vereker! It was a thought full of gall and bitterness.

It was not quite easy for her to keep some of her thoughts out of her face, and old Lady Castleton, glancing at her in her sharp, quick way was struck by her expression.

She was a shrewd old woman, and she did not like that expression. There was no definite feeling against Lady Bridgeworth in this dislike. It came involuntarily, but it was sincere all the same.

There was a little pause before either lady spoke, then Josephine rose and drew her coat together.

"You are quite right, Lady Castleton," she said, in her pleasantest way. "It is impossible to serve two masters; and though I am fond of your little Barbara, as who could fail to be, I cannot—no, I cannot—bring myself to believe evil of Humphrey Lascelles. As I have said before I say again, I am quite sure that there is some most ample explanation to be given for the arrival of that letter; but, naturally, I cannot expect you to agree with me! You don't know the man, and Barbara is your daughter's child."

"My dear Lady Bridgeworth," Lady Castleton said, quietly. "I am a woman of the world, and I have reason to know that there is exceeding villenous in the world. The letter carries its own explanation. You are right there was a mistake, but not of the nature you imagine. Sir Humphrey Lascelles made the mistake of losing his head over a pretty

face, and repenting his folly as soon as his infatuation began to wane. His conduct is infamous! Yes, infamous!" repeated the Countess, a touch of colour coming into her cheeks, and making her almost young.

"Any man who wins a girl's heart and life as he has done this poor child's, and then turns upon her, stamps upon her very heart of hearth, is a coward and a villain; and bearing the peculiarity of Barbara's position in mind, a girl with a known relative in the world, a poor, weak little waif on the ocean of life, I simply cannot find words in which to describe my opinion of his conduct. If I were but a man," and the little old figure reared itself, "I would demand reparation, and wipe out such an insult, such an injury, with the sword itself!"

"If he has really meant all that was written. I agree with you he merits all the publicity and disgrace you can heap upon him."

Josephine held her breath while she waited for the reply. It was the most vital moment of the interview.

Lady Castleton did not answer immediately.

"The punishment is not mine," she said, when she spoke. "Heaven will avenge such a wrong."

"You—you intend to take no steps—to do nothing?"

"It is Barbara's one prayer, one wish against myself I have given her my promise, her wish shall be faithfully carried out!"

Lady Castleton spoke curtly; her anger was very great at this moment.

"Castleton is to know nothing—save that the engagement is at an end," she said, after a short silence. "I shall take Barbara away this morning, and Sir Humphrey Lascelles need not even let her memory become a trouble to him. Barbara Vereker has gone out of his life utterly and entirely, and for ever!"

Josephine stood motionless. The relief was too much. She was saved from all the horrible possibilities of danger that had been crowding on her brain, and making her faint with anxiety.

"You—you will refuse to permit him to—to explain!" she said, forcing the subject up to the very end.

"If Humphrey Lascelles dares to set foot across a threshold of mine he shall be thrown out like the cur he is!"

There was a volume of determination and anger in the old lady's voice. She looked so stern, a living embodiment of relentless justice that Josephine, strong, self-reliant as she was, winced beneath the beautiful eyes that carried such a fire of outraged honour and contempt in their depths.

She knew she was safe now in this quarter. There was Humphrey to be managed, but that seemed an easy matter when all that had seemed so terribly difficult had been overcome so swiftly.

Lady Castleton's voice and manner changed as she saw her guest prepare to leave her.

"I am at a loss to thank you sufficiently, Lady Bridgeworth," she said, graciously, "for coming to me at, I fear, great inconvenience to yourself. Before you go may I trespass so far on your generosity as to ask you if you will help me in one thing more. Where will this letter reach Sir Humphrey Lascelles?"

Josephine felt her heart suddenly sink. A letter! Then some explanation had been given. Some— She grew very pale at a bound, all the horrible difficulties returned. Her wits worked very swiftly; her mind viewed the situation from all points. Lady Castleton was quick to notice this hesitation.

"Perhaps you cannot tell me?" she said, coldly.

Josephine looked up frankly.

"As a matter of fact I cannot, Lady Castleton," she answered, "Sir Humphrey left London ostensibly to go to the north of England. That letter last night, however, was

dated from Brackenbury Court. He may be there—he may not. Of course it is impossible for me to say with any degree of certainty.

To herself she was thinking swiftly,—

"If the letter goes to Brackenbury Julian can go down immediately and secure it;" and then she felt that she would have given every diamond and jewel she possessed in the world to have known what was contained in that letter.

"He is no doubt in London at this very moment," Lady Castleton said, with undisguised contempt. "He would not have been likely to send that letter from any place where disagreeable possibilities might follow on its arrival. I must ask Castleton to tell me his clubs. That will be the best."

"Letters are always forwarded from clubs," Josephine had no real consciousness of what she said. She felt she could not remain in the room any longer with the contents of that letter unknown to her.

She almost cursed herself in this moment for the evil thoughts that had urged her to do the evil things she had done. Should she ever breathe freely again? she wondered.

Lady Castleton put down the envelope on her table as Josephine held out her hand.

"If by chance I find any communications from Muriel or Sir Humphrey on my return home I will send and let you know immediately," Lady Bridgeworth said, with a faint smile.

Lady Castleton took her hand, and returned the smile.

"I shall be infinitely obliged to you, Lady Bridgeworth," she said; and then, with some more graceful words, the two women parted, and Lady Castleton was left standing alone looking down with knit brows.

"I don't like her," she was saying to herself. "She looks true, and sounds true; but something tells me she is false. No, I certainly do not like her!"

Half-an-hour later a note was brought to the Countess.

"DEAR LADY CASTLETON, it said,—

"I have just this instant seen Mr. Lascelles, Sir Humphrey's brother; and from him received the intelligence that Sir Humphrey is in Northshire. I enclose the address. With my sincerest sympathy, and love to Barbara, and kindest regards to yourself, believe me yours most truly,

"JOSEPHINE BRIDGEWORTH."

Lady Castleton folded up the letter, and wrote the address given on her envelope.

"It is not like me to be prejudiced," she said to herself, slowly; "but, somehow, I don't like her, and I don't trust her either."

She sent a few written words of thanks to Lady Bridgeworth, and the letter was delivered after her carriage had conveyed herself, Barbara, and her maid to a railway station, en route for Coombe, one of the largest and most magnificent possessions in the earldom of Castleton.

The butler at Lady Bridgeworth's house informed the Castleton footman, who handed in the note, that her ladyship had left town half-an-hour before, very suddenly, for the north of England, and might be absent some little time; but that she had left directions all letters were to be forwarded, and Lady Castleton's communication should be posted to Northshire without further delay.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MURIEL was a very weak, shattered likeness of her usual sunny self as she alighted at last from the train at the small railway station of Merewold in Northshire.

The journey in itself would have been sufficiently fatiguing under any circumstances; but her head, tortured by that heavy, dull aching, and her heart a match to her head, she was practically and utterly exhausted, and looked so ill as to make Coxon very anxious.

"Indeed, miss, but I wish we'd broken the journey at York, or somewhere," she said, with sincere regret, as she gathered the rugs together. "Sir Humphrey will be so upset-like when he sees you looking so badly."

"I shall be better when I have had some tea. I am only tired, and my head aches so badly," Muriel answered hurriedly.

The mention of Humphrey's name renewed her strength and courage immediately. If it had a horrible day, it was at an end at last. She would be with her dear Humphie, and that was like a glimpse of Heaven. He would get better now she had come; and her heart, full of the happiness of seeing her beloved brother, rose from its depression.

Then she thought of Barbara, and then there was another pleasant throb as she realised that her little sister had long ago received her letter, and her first load of regret at the deception she had practised was off her mind for ever.

Barbara would, in all probability, have sent her a telegram. She forgot her headache and fatigue as this thought came.

They had sent for a dogcart or a conveyance of some sort to take her to Dawson, the keeper's cottage.

Muriel had thought it strange Dawson had not sent to meet her. She construed his absence a little apprehensively at first; and while they waited for this conveyance she made hurried inquiries as to whether any telegram had been received there for Sir Humphrey or herself.

She was disappointed at first, but immediately excused Barbara. Something must have prevented the girl—or perhaps she felt she would rather write than telegraph.

She knew Barbara's delicate mind, and arranged it thus.

It was a long drive to Dawson's home, and the night was cold and wet. Muriel, despite all her efforts, was really ill and worn out when they arrived at last.

She was greeted with great astonishment by Humphrey's valet and by Mrs. Dawson, who ran to the door; and the girl sat with closed eyes, trying to understand, as far as her aching brows would let her, that Sir Humphrey was considerably better, and that her arrival was quite unexpected—that is to say, unexpected until late in the day, when a telegram had come from Mr. Julian, saying she had started to join Sir Humphrey.

Muriel scarcely heard the apologies and explanations as to why no conveyance had been sent to meet her; she was wearied out, bewildered and ill.

"I will go to bed at once. I will not disturb him," she said, when it was told her that Humphrey was fast asleep. "Don't say anything of my being here until the morning?" she said; and then, for the first and only time in her young life, Muriel gave a sigh, and drifted into a heavy faint.

"What could I have done to bring her all this way like this?" demanded Brown, the valet, of Coxon, the maid.

An old feud existed between them, and he was glad of the opportunity of snapping at the young woman, who always—to use his own term—"sauced him" when she got the chance.

Coxon rose to the occasion.

"It were all along of one of them nasty telegrams—that's what it were—and Mr. Brown might just keep his outrageous remarks to himself; as if she (Coxon) were not quite capable of looking after her young lady without his interference!"

With all this display of bad temper the question of the telegram was not properly explained. And Muriel was literally carried up the narrow stairs by Brown, and put to bed by Coxon, conscious of nothing but the racking pain in her head that threatened to drive her almost mad.

A good night's sleep, however, was a wonderful restorative; and when Muriel went into her brother's room the next morning to receive his loving, eager greeting, she looked

very much like her usual self, save for a pallor which might have been caused by her fatigue alone.

A very few words put Humphrey's mind at rest. He had imagined all sorts of things when he had heard of Muriel's arrival. She very soon set any fears at rest.

Barbara was very well, and so was she herself. There was absolutely nothing wrong, except that she could not quite understand why Dawson should have sent Julian such an urgent telegram as he had done.

"I expect he was a bit anxious. I was rather bad the day before yesterday, and as he had to run down to Brackenbury to look after that Buckley Farm business, I have no doubt he did send rather an urgent telegram to Julian!" Sir Humphrey explained.

"Then Dawson is at Brackenbury," said Muriel; and she wondered—though why she scarcely knew or understood—why she felt a sort of uneasy feeling as Humphrey told her Dawson had left on the afternoon of the day before her arrival. "I did not know there was anything wrong at Brackenbury, Humphie," she said.

"There is always something wrong somewhere it seems, Baby," Sir Humphrey said, with a rather wan smile.

He, too, was feeling vaguely restless and depressed now the excitement of Muriel's arrival had worn off.

They both were longing for the post to come with Barbara's letter. Muriel had been most explicit about the loving deception she had practised, and Humphrey had, of course, forgiven her.

"You did it to spare Babs, I know, dear. I don't like anything crooked, as a rule, but this was an exceptional case. Poor little Babs! I am afraid she will have been very unhappy last night."

"She would be doubly unhappy if she could see you now," Muriel said, glancing anxiously at his pale face.

It was so unusual to see Humphrey pale and lying in bed. She had heard all there was to hear about his accident, and had permitted herself to be comforted by his assurance that all was more than well with him; but, nevertheless, she could not be quite happy about him until she saw him able to leave his bed, and have the use of his strong right arm again.

"I hope she will not do anything rash," Humphrey said, moving uneasily as the thought came. "She is not strong enough to take such a journey. You look like a ghost to-day, Muriel. I hope your note will not have frightened her very much?"

"Here is the post!" Muriel cried, as she saw the figure of the old letter-carrier coming through the grounds.

She rushed downstairs, and then it was as though she had been struck some heavy blow. There was only one letter, and it bore the Brackenbury post-mark. It was from Dawson.

Muriel stopped the man, and hurriedly wrote out the telegram which had reached Josephine just as she was starting for her interview with Lady Castleton.

Humphrey received her news, given as cheerfully as she could give it, very quietly.

He only turned a little paler.

"Pray Heaven she is not ill!" was all he said, and Muriel echoed the prayer.

She had been haunted by Barbara's distressed face ever since she had seen her last, when they had kissed each other "good-night;" and knowing, as she did, the effect that mental trouble or illness had upon such a delicately strung system as Barbara's, she was not unprepared to hear that the girl had given way when the reaction came, for Muriel had seen even in that short time that Barbara was beginning to fret herself in all and every direction.

Still, if she were ill, Josephine would, of course, send and let them know. How that day wore away Muriel could never have said. Every sound that came towards the lonely



["IF HUMPHREY LASCHELLES DARES TO COME HERE HE SHALL BE THROWN OUT, LIKE THE CUR THAT HE IS!" SAID LADY CASTLETON.]

little cottage was transformed into a messenger bearing some tidings from London, good or evil. She grew very—very miserable as the hours passed.

"Surely if Barbara is ill Josephine would let us know," she said, over and over again to herself; and then for the hundredth time she would load herself with reproaches for her share in having, perhaps, worked the girl into this possible illness.

Humphrey said nothing. His broken arm gave him great pain, and towards night time he became feverish.

He had received a blow on his head in his fall, and despite his protests that this was not in the least serious, Muriel could not disguise from herself that it might prove troublesome, taken in conjunction with the worry and anxiety which she saw was crowding his brain, notwithstanding his quiescent and comforting manner.

As the afternoon drew into evening he sank into a restless sleep, and Muriel went downstairs to sit and think over the situation.

Was it possible that Barbara could be angry, and for that reason would not write, or had she done as Humphrey feared, taken the first train she could catch to travel northwards. Muriel's knowledge of the girl's supreme love and trust speedily answered this first question. The solution of the problem lay, then, between her second thought, a probably hasty journey or an illness.

"Why does not Josephine send, or Julian?" and then Muriel knitted her brows. She did not quite understand Julian's action. Alas! for her sisterly confidence and affection. She had had too many reasons for knowing Julian was by no means the most distinguished person in the world; and something, she could not tell what, seemed to impress upon her that he had not been actuated by the best and highest motives when he sent her that telegram yesterday morning.

Muriel, dear gentle little soul, however, could

not harbour an unkind thought or suspicion for more than a moment, and she dismissed this feeling almost as soon as it was born.

It was not possible for her to be ungenerous or unjust to a living soul; and, after all, she had no real reason to suspect Julian of having any ulterior motive when he sent that telegram. Humphrey was very ill—Muriel's eyes filled with a sudden rush of tears, as a sort of presentiment seemed to tell her how ill he was and would be, and Julian might have felt it was wise for her to be with the brother who had been all the world to her.

Mrs. Dawson came bustling in and out of the room, and Coxon joined in her entreaties that Miss Muriel would eat something, and not get downcast; for, after all, a broken arm was a tiresome affair, but not a dangerous one, and Sir Humphrey was so strong and healthy he would get better much quicker than others would do in his place.

Muriel accepted the ministrations of these good-hearted humbler beings, and delighted them by drinking the beef-tea they brought her without a murmur, though she swallowed it with difficulty.

And then all at once Mrs. Dawson flitted in, bearing at last the buff-coloured envelope in her hand that Muriel had expected so anxiously all day.

Her fingers trembled as she took the telegram. Her heart beat wildly—there was pleasure and dread in the beat. Was it to say Barbara was ill, or was coming to them, or—

Muriel tore open the envelope, and ran her eye quickly over the contents.

At first the message written was not clear to her, but after one moment's pause she understood it all.

"Coxon," she said, very quietly, though she shivered a little as she spoke. "This is from Lady Bridgeworth. She left London at two o'clock to-day, and is staying the night at

Collyden. She wants me to get her a room near this. We must arrange something."

Coxon sniffed a little.

"Her ladyship ain't such an easy person to arrange!" she said. "Is Miss Vereker coming too, Miss Muriel?"

Muriel paused a moment, and then said, slowly,—

"I think not. Lady Bridgeworth makes no mention of Miss Barbara at all. She merely announces her own coming. She will be here quite early—somewhere about six in the morning. She says we must have breakfast for her when she comes. Will you arrange everything with Mrs. Dawson?"

Coxon acquiesced cordially—not that she had any pleasure in arranging anything so far as Lady Bridgeworth was concerned; but she would do anything for her young mistress.

"My lady coming at six o'clock seems queerlike, and no Miss Barbara. Lor! I do hope as nothing is wrong!"

The presentiment that struck the maid's mind had become an actuality in Muriel's more sensitive one.

She doubted no longer. She knew now that something was very, very wrong.

(To be continued.)

It is not generally known that Ostend oysters are not Ostend oysters at all. They mostly come from England and France, and are only stored at Ostend a short time. There is really nothing in a name, but it frequently means a higher price for all that.

The first solid-head pin was made in 1824, in England, by Lemuel W. Wright, an American. In 1832 Dr. John I. Howe, a Connecticut man, invented a machine for making solid-head pins. It was the first successful machine, and completed the pin by a single process. The old head was soldered on to the shank of the pin.



[HAL MADE A FORWARD STEP, BUT HIS SISTER WAS TOO QUICK FOR HIM!]

NOVELLETTE.]

THE SECRET OF YEARS.

CHAPTER I.

ANTHONY WOODHURST leaned over the low gate which separated the Vicarage from the churchyard, and gave himself up to thought.

It was eight years ago since he had last stood there, looking his farewell at familiar meadow and wood, at the old grey Manor House, with its gabled windows and queer little turrets.

He had been an outcast then, having quarrelled violently with his uncle, old Anthony Woodhurst.

Now he was the rightful owner of the Manor and all its pleasant glebe lands. Far as his eye could reach and farther, his territory extended, and he was one of the richest men in the county.

But if he thought of these things now, the thought brought no gladness to his worn, grave face, or gave consolation to a heart long bowed down by a secret woe.

A flood of bitter memories came over him; and to himself he said,—

"If I had but listened to him then how different my life would be now!"

Eight years ago all the county had been electrified by the news that old Anthony had quarrelled with his nephew, and had ordered him to quit Buttermere at once.

No one knew the cause of the rupture between these two who, until now, had never differed, who had seemed all in all to each other ever since young Anthony came, a small boy in tunics, to the Manor.

But whatever the quarrel was about the uncle still continued the nephew's allowance, and for the rest forbade any, even his old friend, Mr. Hesketh, the Vicar, to mention the culprit's name to him.

So the seasons came and went, and the old

man lived his lonely life, seldom emerging from his solitude; and in the eighth year he fell sick, and knowing intuitively that the hand of death was upon him, he relented towards his nephew, and sent to him, praying him to let bygones be bygones, and come at once to him that he might close his life in peace.

Anthony instantly responded. He was unfeignedly grieved that his uncle was slipping away from him, and he said so in a broken voice, to which the other replied,—

"Yes, lad, yes! I know all you would say; and I see now I was too harsh with you. Often and often my better nature has prompted me to recall you; but as often my pride and obstinacy have prevented me. You can never guess how sorely I have missed you. Poor boy! poor boy! Things have gone badly with you." And then after a pause, whilst his feeble hands closed over his nephew's, "I have made what recompense I can. I have left you the Manor and all I possess save legacies to the servants; and perhaps it is because dying eyes see clearly, that I dare foretell good things and happy days for you in the future."

Those were almost his last words. At midnight he stirred a little, and said,—

"You forgive me, Anthony?"

"I have nothing to forgive. Would to Heaven I could keep you with me!"

A faint, satisfied smile crossed the wan face, and then all was still; and, for the first time in his life, Anthony looked on death.

They buried the old man with his forefathers, and all the county came to do him honour; but of real mourners there was only one—his long-discarded nephew.

He seemed as a stranger among the throng. He had left them a happy, light-hearted young fellow of twenty-two—he had returned a grave, melancholy man, looking older than his thirty years.

There were already streaks of grey in his dark hair, and little lines of pain under

the eyes, upon the broad brow. "Evidently he had suffered some great grief," said the wise ones, and at once they set to work to discover his secret trouble.

But young Anthony was as reticent as his uncle had been before him, and refused to making a confidante of any creature.

There were those who hinted at something shameful in his past, but they were in the minority, and were quickly suppressed.

Old Anthony had been buried three days now; and his nephew, wearying of the gloom of the house, bethought him of Mr. Hesketh, his very good friend and one time tutor.

He would accept the very cordial invitation proffered by the Vicar and his wife, and call upon them.

It was with that intention he set out, but reaching the churchyard gate he had paused to look back, and so fallen into a reverie, as his eyes rested on the goodly place he called his own.

He was startled at length by the swift rustling of small feet through the long grass, and before he could turn, someone had dealt him a stinging box on the ears, and a musical voice had said,—

"Oh, you sneak!"

Surprised, dazed, and somewhat angry, he flashed upon his assailant, a young and extremely pretty girl, who now showed every sign of confusion, as she endeavoured to stammer out an apology.

But she broke off in the middle of her sentence. Her great grey eyes literally brimmed over with mischief, and the wickedest little dimples played hide-and-seek in her cheeks and about her pretty mouth.

"I thought you were Hal—men dress so absurdly alike. I—I am very sorry—but—but—" and then she utterly lost all self-control and laughed such a whole-hearted, happy laugh that in spite of himself Anthony smiled.

"Hal! Is he your brother? If so, you must be Miss Hesketh."

"Yes, I am Scamp—I mean Violet Hesketh, but they always call me Scamp at home. I really don't know why. Oh! Mr. Woodhurst, you will not tell them of my mistake, will you? Hal would never cease teasing me, and he makes my life nearly intolerable now."

"I will promise to say nothing of my unmerited chastisement," smiling gravely, "if you will tell me in what way Hal offended you."

The girl's fair face flushed crimson. "I would rather not," she began, then added, quickly, "But I owe you some reparation—and I shall be so grateful if you keep my silly mistake secret—because, of course, you aren't really a little bit like Hal. The fact is, I have been trying to write a poem on Hero and Leander, and the results are awful. But that is no excuse for Hal's deliberately taking it from my desk and reading it to Mr. Logan (one of papa's pupils). I heard them laughing boisterously over it, and I wanted to punish my brother. So when I saw you leaning over the gate I thought you must be Hal, and I never stayed to look a second time. I was in such a hurry to get my revenge," and here her sense of the ridiculous again overcame her, and she laughed in a way which did one's heart good to hear.

When the merry sound had died out her companion said,—

"Mr. Hesketh was good enough to invite me to your four o'clock tea. He assumed me it was quite a family affair. Shall I be intending if I accept his invite?"

"Both he and mamma will be very glad to welcome you. They are so sorry for your loss and your loneliness, and then the bright eyes grew soft, the pretty face was instinct with sympathy. "You do not look happy," she said, with childlike simplicity, "and we are all most grieved for you."

"Thank you," the man answered, gently, and the grave face bent upon hers was very kindly. "Your voice sounds as though you mean every word you say. And all the while you laugh and talk I am trying to trace in you some likeness to the little Scamp I used to know eight years ago. You were a mere baby then."

"I was ten," she answered, with an odd assumption of dignity; "and now of course I am a woman grown, but no one at home treats me as one."

"You speak as though you rather regret that fact?"

"I do. I hate playing at being a child. But, you see, so many died between Hal and myself—four—he is twenty-three—that they have all got into the way of regarding me as a baby or a toy; and it isn't always pleasant. Mr. Woodhurst, you do quite forgive my impertinence?"

"Say no more about it; but tell me how you recognised me as your old playmate. You surely did not remember my features?"

"Oh, no," with a frankness that would have wounded a vainer man. "I had altogether forgotten what you were like. But at Battersea everybody knows everybody, and when I saw a stranger before me I knew he could be none other than Mr. Anthony Woodhurst. Now, if you please, we will go home—mamma is punctuality itself with regard to tea. You will not object taking it in the garden? It is so pleasant under the trees these hot afternoons!"

He hastened to assure her he would like it of all things, and walked beside her down the narrow path leading from the orchard to the Vicarage, thinking all the while how pretty she was, and how well the dainty blue cotton gown she wore became the slender girlish figure! The bright masses of waving hair fell in pretty dishevelment about her throat and shoulders; but she seemed wholly unconscious that they had escaped from their bands. Her fresh young face was flushed rose-pink, and her great grey eyes gleamed like stars under the black lashes, all the

while she chatted naturally of this or that, in her low, sweet voice; and now and again, at some whimsical thought or speech, she laughed softly. Evidently she had no cares of her own, and even "the burdens of others" had scarcely "cast a shadow" over that glad young life.

Anthony sighed, half-enviously. Ah! to be young again, and with all the world before him!

"They are waiting for us, Mr. Woodhurst! There is mamma at her post. That tall, broad, shouldered man to her right is Hal; the other is Tom, properly Mr. Logan. I hope you will dislike him as much as I do!"

"Why is he such an object of aversion to you?"

"Because he is such an utter prig! That is one of Hal's words—and—oh! for fifty other reasons. Mamma, I hope we have not kept you waiting?" and with that she delivered her companion over to Mrs. Hesketh, a tall, aristocratic woman, with gracious ways and kindly smile, who having introduced him to Mr. Logan, made room for him between herself and son.

"Mr. Hesketh has been called suddenly away. He will be very disappointed at having missed you; but I hope you will be quite a frequent visitor here—coming in and out as you used to do, Anthony."

"Thank you!" he answered, gratefully. "I shall be tempted to take your words so literally that I shall quickly become an intruder and a nuisance."

"Indeed, no! And it must be so very dull for you alone in that big place—not that we can offer you any amusement."

"Nonsense, mother. What false humility to deary your own resources," laughed Hal. "Have you not always an attraction in the person of our young Sappho? Woodhurst, allow me to present you to the new poetess."

"Hal, you are the meanest creature under the sun," flashed Scamp. "You are below contempt!"

"My dear! my dear!" began Mrs. Hesketh, in a tone of remonstrance, when Hal interrupted her by ruthlessly commencing to quote from the much-maligned poem:

"Thus stood the maid in anguish gazing
Across the blue and trackless deep;
And finding none her charms appraising,
She laid her down and went to sleep."

"It is only fair to tell you the first two lines are Scamp's, the last mine. My dear girl, why that terrific scowl?"

Scamp made no reply; and Tom Logan, who did not at all appreciate being left out of the conversation, broke in.

"There was another stanza which impressed me strongly. I think it ran somewhat in this fashion:—

"Her cheek was pale, her brow was burning,
Within her breast her heart was sore."
Then from the sea in fury turning,
She opened her mouth and loudly swore."

concluded Hal, with a burst of laughter, which startled the sleepy birds amongst the trees.

Scamp sprang to her feet.

"You may think it kind and gentlemanly to turn a girl to ridicule for the entertainment of friends, but I think such conduct is disgusting. Thackeray lost much in not knowing you! You would have adorned his 'Book of Snobs' so delightfully," saying which she turned on her heel, and disappeared amidst the trees. Hal whistled, Tom looked discomfited, whilst Anthony's face showed he thought the teasing had gone a trifle too far.

"It was too bad to plague the child," said Mrs. Hesketh, vexedly. "You know how sensitive she is; and really you had no right to ransack her desk."

"Now, mother, don't lecture! It does the little monkey good to tease her a bit, and she is so funny in a temper. Tom, you and I must look out for ourselves, for be sure she will have her revenge."

But Mr. Logan made no response. He was wishing he had not followed quite so openly in Hal's wake, and the peace of the little party seemed in some indefinable way disturbed.

Violet (or Scamp to give her her home name) did not appear again; and it was not until Anthony had left the Vicarage that he came upon a shadowy figure on the confines of the churchyard.

"Miss Scamp," he ventured to say, ever so gently, and with her head bent low, so that the broad hat wholly shaded the small *sonnie* face. She answered,—

"Yes, Mr. Woodhurst, it is I! Are you going? Then good-night!"

He could not be sure, but he thought she had been crying, her voice sounded so unceremonious.

"Poor little girl!" he said, taking one small soft hand in his. "It was a shame to tease you so badly; but you should not let them see how much you are hurt by their nonsense. One day, when you knew me better, perhaps you will let me see your work. Many a poet has been spoiled by want of encouragement."

Her eyes thanked him as she murmured good-night, and turned away.

CHAPTER II.

"He who idly grieves

That life is crownless, is a fool and blind.

To fill with patience our allotted sphere,

To rule the self within us strong in faith,

To answer smile with smile and tear with tear,

To perfect character, and conquer death,

This is what God's own angels call renown."

Thus quoted Scamp, standing before Anthony with flushed cheeks and starbright eyes. "I don't think, Mr. Woodhurst, you ought to talk of a wasted or purposeless life when there is so much you can do."

"What incentive have I to work?" he asked, sadly.

"The good of others—your poor tenants! Why some of them are housed worse than beggars, and they work so hard for such a little wage. Perhaps you don't guess what cruel times they have? How should you when you never go amongst them, when you have never known what it is to have a wish refused, or a whim ungratified?"

He looked at the young creature in undisguised surprise. He had regarded her until now as a bright, careless child, without a thought beyond the morrow, and now he found she had the mind and heart of a woman—the deep, quick sympathy for suffering that all tender natures feel. He spoke more gravely to her than he ever yet had done.

"You do not understand," he said. "Mercifully your life has been kept in the sunshine. No evil or bitter thing has shadowed it, and I pray that your way may always be kept smooth. As for me my path is gloomy indeed, and I see no ray of hope to lighten the darkness. I gave up hope long ago!"

"That was not well," she answered, quickly. "And do you dream that you stand alone in your grief? Whatever that grief may be there are thousands of others more wretched than you, because they have sinned. Why don't you rouse yourself from this melancholy? There is work for you to do, and work is the best panacea for trouble."

The grave face was pitiful as it was bent upon the girl.

"My child," he said, "when you have known sorrow you will not reason so wisely about it. There, dismiss the subject from your mind, and let me see your poem."

"But your tenants?" she urged, with sweet insistence.

"I promise to do all in my power to promote their comfort! Are you content, Scamp?"

"More than content!"

And then she gave her precious manuscript into his hands. It was very crude, and the meaning was not always clear; but here and

there he found gems of thought. And when he praised this or that stanza she flushed rosy red with pleasure.

But she was disappointed when, at the close of the reading, he advised her to undertake less ambitious flights.

"You were meant for a home-bird," he said, kindly; "and by the hearth your songs would be sweet. Try a ballad next, and you will do yourself justice. Epic poems and tragedies are not your forte!"

She was grateful to him that he did not ridicule her first poor little effort, and soon found herself chatting of her favourite authors and musicians as easily as though she had known him years instead of days.

She walked with him to the Vicarage gates, he refusing to remain for luncheon, and there she bade him good-bye; and, retracing her steps, confronted Tom Logan in one of the quaint alleys with which the gardens abounded.

"You've been with that fellow Woodhurst exactly two hours!" the young man said, wrathfully. "I saw you from the study window. He read your poem too. No doubt he flattered you to the top of your bent; and you believed all his highflown compliments. I wonder if all girls are as foolish as you?"

"Explain yourself, please," Scamp answered, haughtily. "Your language is High Dutch to me, and your meaning equally obscure."

"I will make it plain, then. Ever since Woodhurst came among us you have flouted me, ignored my very existence (when that was possible), and showed in all conceivable ways that you were bent upon reducing him to submission—"

"If you say another word like that I will never speak to you again," Scamp retorted, passionately. "How dare you so grossly insult me? And you know I never even liked you," she went on, with cruel candour. "You have always done your best to make yourself obnoxious. In future, please do not address me save under compulsion." With that she would have passed him, but he barred her way, and compelled her to listen.

"You strike hard, and one day you may be sorry that you treated me so cruelly. In all things I have striven to please you, but nothing I do finds favour with you. And now, when this man (who, for some crime has been an outcast from home and family for eight years) returns, you succumb at once to his fascinations."

"If Hal were here he would knock you down for such words," Scamp retorted, with spirit. "Now stand aside, and let me pass."

"No, I will be heard. What do you know of Woodhurst's past? What has he done with those eight years he gives no account of? Where did he hide himself that none of his old friends ever met him or heard of him? Do you think it was a light thing, a mere venial error which caused old Anthony to act as he did?"

"Why do you address such questions to me? Am I Mr. Woodhurst's keeper? Do I hold the key of his conscience? I am his friend, it is true, and proud of his friendship. There are few men so worthy of esteem as he!" With which speech, uttered with an air of defiance, she brushed by the infuriated young man, but he followed and overtook her.

"Violet, have a little mercy on me, a little thought for your own welfare. Give up this fellow. I will do my best to make you happy. I love you, upon my soul I do; and I feel I could make you care for me if only you would let me try."

"I am afraid you over-rate your abilities," the girl answered, idly. He had so sorely wounded her by the execrable taste of his previous remarks that she felt no pity for him then. "I can never think of you as you wish. Let the subject be forgotten between us. Rest assured I shall never say one word to any of this interview; I am not proud of my conquest," and then she left him standing

in a white fury, almost hating her in that moment for the bitter words she had spoken.

It was gall and wormwood to the young man in the days that followed to see how dexterously Scamp avoided him—how cleverly she contrived never to be left alone with him, or to enter into any conversation in which he bore a part.

He hated her for her pride and coldness, but he loved her for her beauty, and was fully resolved that soon or late she should be his.

Anthony came and went until all unconsciously the girl began to look for his coming, and to wonder why the days when he did not come seemed so long and empty.

She did not then dream how near she was to loving him—how much he influenced her life, her thoughts, her literary or artistic tastes. She only felt it was pleasant to spend the long, bright hours beside him, to listen to the grave, low voice, telling of wonderful men and their wonderful deeds.

As for Anthony he never spoke of love. He never tried by look or speech to win the treasure of that pure young heart. He knew—ah, none so well, that such joy was not for him—that between him and his girl-friend there yawned a black abyss over which they might not leap hands and be glad.

And yet—oh! the pity of it—each was drifting nearer and nearer to Love's domain, and there were many bitter days in store for both.

If one had told Anthony then he was treading on dangerous ground he would have laughed the idea to scorn; and when at length the secret of his heart was revealed to him it would come upon him with a terrible shock.

July came and passed, and Logan's vacation came. He was loth to go; he hated leaving the field to his rival, as he was pleased to imagine Anthony. But Mr. Hesketh did not press him to stay the vacation with them. Truth to tell, the young man was not a favourite at the Vicarage.

But he would not leave without planting some sting in Scamp's breast. It should not be his fault if he did not break her faith in Anthony.

So on the morning of his departure he sought her ostensibly to say good-bye; and finding her alone in the breakfast-room, said,—

"Miss Violet, I am off now. I wish I were not; but I'll be back again in October—although that seems a long way off."

"It is," said Scamp, ruthlessly interrupting him. "We may all be dead before autumn comes, and many things might occur to prevent your return to Battermore."

"I believe you are glad I am going—that you hope never to see me again; but I'll come back if only to spoil sport for Woodhurst. It would be as well not to compromise yourself too far with him. I am going to find out the shady side of his life—and you would scarcely care to have your name connected with that of a felon or profligate!"

The girl was white as death, but her great grey eyes blazed with anger as she answered,—

"Hitherto I have refrained from complaining to my father of your persecutions; but if you presume to speak to me again as you have spoken this morning, I will not spare you. If he knew the truth you would never be permitted to cross the threshold of his house again. He receives none but gentlemen."

"Am I not one? By birth your equal, by riches your superior!" Logan said, savagely.

"Why is it you are so averse to me?"

"You weary me with your questions and threats," the girl murmured, languidly.

"Please to leave me now, or I will summon mamma to my assistance."

She sank into a chair and turned resolutely from him; but he, with all his faults, with all the listlessness of his nature, loved her well, and he could not leave her in such a fashion.

"Forgive me," he pleaded. "My love for you is driving me mad, Violet! Why are you so cruel? Why are you so deaf to my entreaties?"

"Would you have me coquette with you?"

coldly. "Would you wish me to buoy you with hopes I never meant to fulfil? Mr. Logan, pray believe my refusal is final. I have no more to say, unless it is—forget me!"

"You would have answered differently but for Woodhurst!"

"Go!" cried Scamp. "You offend beyond forgiveness," and without a word he went. But in his heart he was vowing to punish her for her disdain, to bend her to his own will, and to degrade Anthony in her eyes.

All through his vacation he kept that one thought before him, until it became almost a mania with him. He was always introducing Anthony's name to his friends, in the hope of gleaming some fresh knowledge of him. Generally he failed; no one seemed to know what he had done with those eight years of his life, and Logan was almost in despair, when he was introduced to some people named Crocker. The daughter was pretty, and having learned that Tom himself was a very eligible parti, at once set herself to capture the prize. The Crockers adored money, being impetuous themselves. When Miss Crocker learned that Tom was studying with the Vicar of Battermore, preparatory to entering college, she turned to her mother, exclaiming,—

"Oh, mamma! isn't that the place of which Mr. Woodhurst or Wodehurst used to speak?"

"Woodhurst!" said Tom, pricking up his ears. "Do you mean Anthony? How strange he should be a mutual friend!"

"You know him?" asked Miss Crocker. "He is awfully nice, is he not? And we all felt so sorry for him; his life was such a sad one."

"He has come into a fortune," said Tom, "but it seems to have brought him no great happiness."

"How could it? The higher his position the worse his lot, because, of course, the story must become public property!"

"What story? Anthony is very reserved. We know less than nothing of his life during the past few years—it is all a mystery. Of course we cannot fail to see the change in him, but we cannot account for it. Miss Crocker, is there no help for him? Won't you confide your knowledge to me? I would use it only for good!"

She loved money, but she had the making of a good woman in her, and she was glad to think she could help one so wretched as Anthony; so she said, quickly,—

"I will tell you all you wish to know, but not now; there are some people coming in. But to-night you dine with us, then I will find an opportunity to speak with you alone. It was at Brussels we first met Mr. Woodhurst. When you see him will you tell him we have not forgotten him, and that we hope life is brighter for him now?" With that she glided away and mixed with her mother's guests, and Tom Logan waited with hot impatience for the coming disclosures, whilst Miss Crocker thought, "Surely to-night he will ask the momentous question, and this mutual knowledge will draw us nearer!"

But in this she was mistaken. Tom listened to all she had to tell (and she spoke with true womanly sympathy), thanked her for her confidence, and having no further use for her, no longer danced attendance upon her. But his acquaintances one and all commented upon his elation, and wondered over it. All this Tom knew, and it stoked his vanity, put him on the best of terms with himself. But to no one did he confide the secret of his exultant manner. He was preparing for a grand *dénoûment*; he would not have it spoiled for worlds. He would hug his knowledge close until he returned to Battermore, and then, in presence of them all—Mr. and Mrs. Hesketh, Hal and Violet—he would denounce his rival, and bring home his guilt to him; and then, thought this arch traitor, "She will be glad to listen to me! Oh! I have the whip hand of them all now. She will not dare to use her tongue so freely for

my benefit, because I can cover her with confusion if I choose;" and with such thoughts as these the amiable youth beguiled the tedious days and weeks which must elapse before he joined the Buttermere circle; and he also took care to apprise himself of all their movements.

CHAPTER III.

On the first of October Tom Logan returned to Buttermere in the highest of spirits. His rival was at his mercy, and he was going to open Violet's eyes to his misdemeanours. She would be so humiliated that she would pay any price for his silence. So satisfied was he that the game was in his hands, that he could afford to be generous to the girl, and quite ignore their last disagreeable interview.

"Really," said Violet, an hour or two after his arrival, "the vacation has worked miracles on Mr. Logan. He bears some likeness now to a civilised being!"

"Scamp, you should not cultivate a habit of sarcasm."

"It is a natural taste, not a cultivated one, my revered mamma," laughed the girl, "and occasionally I have found it of service. Oh, dear! how sorry I am that our delicious evenings are at an end! I wish Tom Logan were at the Antipodes!"

"Despite the marked improvement in his bearing?"

"Yes; because he never can be anything better than 'tolerable.' Would it not be nice if dad were not compelled to take pupils? They are always more or less of a nuisance!"

"Still they are a nuisance we cannot very well dispense with. Now run and make your toilet, or you will be late as usual, and I have some letters to finish."

"Very well. Mamma, did you know Hal had asked Mr. Woodhurst up this evening to try his new violin duet with him? I expect we shall have some fun, for poor Hal makes no headway with his instrument," and with that she ran lightly away to her own room.

She looked distractingly pretty when she came down half an hour later, wearing a dress of some soft ruby material, cut square at the throat, and relieved by white lace. The sleeves were loose from the elbow, and falling away revealed the slender white arms, whose perfect symmetry was unspoiled by bracelets or bangles.

Tom looked at her with undisguised admiration and a throb of triumph, as he thought one day all this loveliness would be his; but he was careful to say nothing that might disturb her peace, or bring down her wrath upon himself.

She was very merry and saucy throughout the meal, teasing Hal almost beyond his endurance, making fun of everything and everyone.

But in the drawing-room she became quieter, and sitting at the piano played soft, dreamy snatches of music, whilst she waited for Anthony's coming.

She was beginning to know the secret of that sweet unrest which possessed her now, day and night, but she refused to acknowledge the truth even to herself; and she was wholly unconscious how deep a root this new love had in her heart, or that losing Anthony she would lose all that made life beautiful and bright.

He came at last, bearing his beloved violin with him, and Tom hated him with a deadly hate as he saw how the colour leapt into Violet's face, and the light came into her pretty eyes. But it consoled him to think that the hour of his triumph was near.

There was much laughter at Hal's expense as he stumbled through his part, evoking most hideous discords, until in sheer pity Violet took the violin from him, and gave a perfect rendering of the passage he had found so difficult.

"I am disgusted with myself," Hal said, flinging himself into a chair. "I could almost

vow never to take a bow in my hand again, only that I know I should break my word!"

"A thing he is doing fifty times a day!" said Scamp, *sotto voce*. "Hal is nothing if not variable."

"Be careful, young lady. I've forgiven you seventy times seven for your offences against me, and my patience is all but exhausted."

"Do you threaten?" laughed Scamp, retreating backwards to a far corner, where, sitting in the shadows, she openly defied Hal.

Now was the time for Tom to strike his blow. He wished he could see Scamp's face more clearly, it would be some satisfaction to mark how she received his news. Leaning forward, he addressed Anthony nonchalantly.

"By the way, Woodhurst, during my vac. I met some friends of yours, who inquired with special cordiality after you!"

"Friends of mine!" Anthony said, and his voice had a strange, uneasy note in it, which was music to his rival. "I do not boast many. Are you not mistaken?"

"Oh, no! Miss Crocker said she was on terms of great intimacy with you whilst you were at Brussels."

"Crocker! Yes, I remember the family well now."

"Miss Crocker especially entrusted me with many kindly messages to yourself and that very mythical lady—your wife. I told her you were unmarried, but she protested she had been well acquainted with Mrs. Woodhurst. Of course it was all a mistake."

There was a dead silence, and Anthony's face was by no means reassuring, so white and drawn it was.

He had risen, and was standing with one hand resting upon the table, his gloomy, despairing eyes meeting Tom's with something like contempt in their depths. Then he spoke in a low, stern voice,—

"It had been kinder to broach such a subject to me alone. You must have known it was a painful one to me. Mr. Hesketh, what Logan says is quite true. I have been married these eight years!"

He dared not glance at Violet. In one awful moment he realised all that she had grown to him; and if she, in her innocence, had learned to love him, what words were bitter enough to condemn him?

As his voice broke the sudden silence the girl had leaped eagerly forward, as though she hoped he would refute the charge; and then, as he said, "It is quite true," a slight, sharp sound escaped her.

After that she sat perfectly quiet, her face mercifully hidden from Tom's keen glance, and her hands were fast clenched in the folds of her pretty gown.

"Why were you at such pains to hide the fact of your marriage?" Mr. Hesketh asked, coldly; "and why is your wife not living with you? Why have you been sailing under false pretences?"

He was but mortal; and, remembering how often Scamp had been this man's companion, he feared for her peace of mind, the security of her good name.

"I have been much to blame in keeping this secret from you. No one can reproach me more bitterly than I reproach myself, for soon or late the facts must have been known. Only I put off the evil day of confession from time to time, hoping I hardly know what—glad to live (for a little while, at least) in peace and content. Now hear my story. It is a painful one, and I will be as brief in telling it as possible."

Tom Logan rose to leave the room, but Anthony stayed him by an imperious gesture.

"Stop, sir? You were ready enough to condemn me—for it was malice which prompted you to publish my story. I insist that you hear the conclusion of it; I am not quite the guilty wretch you would have me appear."

And Tom sat down again, not feeling quite so confident of his rival's defeat as before.

Anthony, still standing, still speaking in low and measured tones, began the history of his ill-starred love and marriage.

"It was just before I had graduated that I met my wife. She was the daughter of Colonel Fitzpatrick, a member of a very old Irish family."

"They were staying at Oxford, and Nora was quite the belle of the city. I was young and impressionable, and soon believed myself in love with her—she was so bright and pretty."

"I proposed, was accepted; and flushed with triumph, came to Buttermere to receive my uncle's congratulations."

"To my surprise he was furious at the news, and insisted that I should at once end an engagement which he declared in every way undesirable."

"He said that I had better be dead than marry into such a family as the Fitzpatricks, for they were bad root and branch. He added, too, that the Colonel (Nora's father) was a confirmed drunkard, utterly without principle, and had nothing but his pay to exist upon—that society had ceased to receive him or his."

"These things I knew, but I was not going to marry the Colonel; and it would be easy to separate Nora from her family when once she was my wife."

"I urged my uncle to see her, feeling sure her pretences would win upon him. But he refused, saying he would not be a party to my ruin—that no man was safe who wedded one of her race, for they were cursed by hereditary drunkenness."

"Then I lost my temper, and swore if Nora was not my wife no other woman should be. It was impossible to think of that delicate, refined girl as a drunkard."

"I took my own headstrong way, and married her secretly. Then I communicated the news to my uncle."

"His reply came quickly—it was brief and cold. He desired to see me no more, but he would not leave me to starve; consequently, he would continue my allowance of four hundred per annum."

"To Nora this seemed a fortune, and when in pursuance of my uncle's expressed desire we went abroad she was delighted."

"The first few weeks of our marriage were full of happiness to me; and the thought of my kind old guardian's loneliness troubled me but little."

"But presently a cloud appeared on the horizon. Just as had been predicted Nora began to evince a too great liking for alcohol in any form."

"Remembering the warning I had received, and the curse of her family, I remonstrated at first gently, then with exceeding bitterness, and she would promise abstinence—for then she had some regard left for me."

"But always she broke her promise, and at last she publicly disgraced herself at a dinner given by a great man of Brussels. After that I refused to go into society. Always, when possible, I avoided English tourists, and sought out quiet towns and villages where we might live unknown."

"Her terrible vice grew and grew until she was scarcely ever sober; and there were times when I would rush out and spend long hours in the fields and woods, because I dare not trust to my own forbearance. I was afraid that in a fit of fury I might strike her dead."

"As a last resource, a year ago, I consulted a medical man, who had made such cases as hers his particular study, and he advised that I should place her in an asylum for inebriates."

"I did so, and from month to month the reports I receive of her condition are favourable. Shortly she will be pronounced cured, and then must take her place here as my wife—the lady of the Manor!"

"And how are you going to account for your reticence concerning her?" asked Mrs. Hesketh, icily.

"I do not know!" wearily; "but I must spare her at any cost to myself. She is still my wife. And I dared to hope that in you, who have been so kind to me, she would find a friend, that you would not wholly forbid me the house and your society."

Then Hal cried out,—

"By Jove! whoever fails you I won't. You've suffered enough already; and there are scores of gaddies (this with a glance at Tom) who'll be glad to sting you again and again. Woodhurst, I'm denociously sorry for you!"

The language was not elegant, but the speaker was sincere; and moved by his son's enthusiasm Mr. Hesketh tendered his hand.

Only the mother held aloof, fearing that all unwittingly this man had blighted her darling's life. Then, as with one consent, they turned to look at Scamp; and she, suddenly grown a woman by reason of her love and her pain, stepped forward into the light.

She was very pale, but she bravely smiled as she looked into Anthony's eyes.

"Thank you for your confidence," she said, gently; "and if Mrs. Woodhurst will accept me as her very loyal friend I shall be glad."

So she solved the difficulty, as her mother never could have done with all her store of worldly wisdom; and she did it so naturally that all of them saw no thought of scandal regarding herself could have entered her young and innocent mind.

"Violet has answered for us both," said Mrs. Hesketh; but she did not speak too warmly, knowing that the girl had not escaped heart-whole and fancy free.

The ice being once broken Anthony spoke freely of his wretched past, begging earnestly for help and sympathy for his unhappy wife; and Tom Logan, feeling he was rather an object of contempt than otherwise, escaped to his room, and presently Scamp, too, disappeared.

She was so young! so young! and altogether unused to trouble. She had borne herself bravely before them all. She had given no hint of the pain she bore, but her strength was fast fading, and she was too proud to show her weakness before them all.

So she went bareheaded into the garden. It was bitterly cold, but little she recked of cold or outward discomfort.

Her brain was on fire, her heart was aching with an intolerable burden, and through all her grief there ran a sense of shame that she had given her love unsought. What right had she to love Anthony? He belonged to another woman. And then she bowed her fair face in her hands, and moaned,—

"It is a sin! Ah, Heaven forgive me! it is a sin!" and she wept as though her heart would break.

It was then she felt a hand pressed lightly on her shoulder and heard a too dearly-loved voice say in tones of gentlest reproof,—

"My child, what are you doing here?"

She lifted her woe-begone face, down which the tears were streaming; and Anthony's heart smote him as he saw how pinched and wan it looked.

"Let me be," she said. "I could not stay in the house. I am better here."

"But you are cold, and rain has begun to fall."

He passed his hand lightly over her lovely hair—it was wet with the night dew and the rain. He took off his overcoat, and, despite her remonstrances, wrapped it about her head and shoulders.

Side by side they stood, and neither could find any word to say for very long. But at last Anthony spoke.

"You do not quite despise me, Scamp?"

"With all my heart I pity you," she answered, brokenly. "Oh! may Heaven help you to bear your burden."

He took her small, cold hands in his.

"Do you really mean you will befriend my poor lost wife?" he asked.

"Yes," and she could say no more.

"From my heart I thank you. Oh, child! oh, child!" and his voice died shudderingly out.

It was so hard, so hard to leave her there in her sorrow—sorrow he had wrought, and say no word of comfort.

Very, very gently she loosed her hands from his.

"Go now, please. I must not stay."

There was no disguise or concealment between them now. Each read the other's heart, each knew the intensity of the other's woe.

"Good-bye!" she said, "and Heaven be with you in all your ways."

"You will forget, child, as I pray you will forgive," he said, and then he prisoned the sweet white face between his hands and looked yearningly into the deep, sad eyes. "If I had only known! if I had only known! I would have died rather than have given you one hour's pain."

"Oh, hush! oh, hush! your pity breaks me down. Leave me to myself, and soon I shall be strong. In the way you have to tread, in all the darkness of your life, if it is any help or any consolation to you, remember that I am praying for you; that, if in anything I can help you or—Mrs. Woodhurst, I am wholly at your service."

He bent and reverently kissed the innocent brow.

"Forget me!" he said, brokenly, "forget me!" and with that he vanished in the darkness; and like one walking in a dream she crept back to the house and up to her room, there to kneel, sobbing and praying that Heaven would be merciful and make Anthony's life bright, no matter at what cost to her.

CHAPTER IV.

"SCAMP, Anthony has gone to Briardale."

"Briardale!" said Scamp, without turning her head, because of the mention of Anthony's name she had flushed crimson. "And pray where is Briardale?"

"Somewhere in the midlands. He had a letter this morning from the principal of the asylum there, enclosing one from his wife. It seems she is quite cured, and he is summoned to remove her. He has given orders to the servants to prepare for her coming, and all Buttermere is agape about the matter. Somehow, too, it has oozed out that she is not all she should be!"

"You may guess who started that report," Scamp said, with flashing eyes. "It was Tom Logan. He is an unmitigated sneak!"

"Thank you, Miss Violet, for your good opinion," said Tom's voice behind them. "Yours is that charity which thinketh no evil."

The girl turned contemptuously upon him. "What a splendid spy was lost in you, and how true it is listeners rarely hear any good of themselves! Well, Hal, you were telling me of Mrs. Woodhurst's coming. When is she expected to arrive?"

"Can't say exactly; but I do think it will be infernally unpleasant for us to receive her, and for Anthony's sake we can't very well close our doors to her."

"It might give rise to unpleasant remarks," Tom said.

"What the deuce do you mean? Look here, I'm not the sort of fellow to take your innuendoes calmly, and if I hear any more of your confounded impertinences I'll break every bone in your body. Do you hear?"

"Yes, and am not afraid of your threats. If you will have a row well and good, but popular opinion will go with me when the reason of our quarrel is known."

Hal made a forward step, but his sister was too quick for him.

"Do not degrade yourself by an altercation with an inferior. Mr. Logan, may I remind you this room is for the exclusive use of the family?"

He looked at her a moment in amazement. How she had changed in a few days! Her eyes were still as bright, and the bloom on her cheek as delicately fresh as before, but there was a new dignity in her voice and manner, which suited her piquante prettiness admirably.

"I am sorry that I have offended you," he said, lamely; "but I did not speak without reason."

"Say no more, sir; the apology is worse than the offence!"

And not a little discomfited Tom slunk from the room, catching the sound of Hal's smothered laughter as he went.

Being once more alone with his sister, the young man spoke in an aggrieved tone.

"I'm a little sore with Woodhurst, too; such friends as we were he should have confided in his; and it was neither wise nor kind to spend so much of his time with you. You know how ill-natured village gossips are!"

"What are they saying about me?" interrupted the girl, quickly.

"Oh, well, of course it's all nonsense; but some very unpleasant remarks concerning you have reached me—in a roundabout way, of course."

"Of course," sarcastically; "but forewarned is forearmed, and I shall know how to silence my friends. What is the worst thing they say of me?"

"Don't fret about it, Scamp, because, old lady, we know how false it is; but they hint you are awfully in love with Anthony, and—"

"Is that all?" she asked, in level tones; but there was an ominous flash in her eyes, and the pretty lips were set in a hard line.

"I ought not to have told you, old girl, but I thought it was right you should know—and—and you are sure you don't care for Woodhurst in that way?"

"You did right to acquaint me with these rumours; and for the rest Mr. Woodhurst and I are very good friends—nothing more."

So bravely she spoke, so serenely she met his earnest gaze, that the young man was satisfied his sister had suffered no harm.

He thought, too, of her bright ways, and merry, audacious speeches. No girl with a secret sorrow could be so gay and mischievous as Scamp, and never for a moment did he guess that the bright exterior was the result of woman's pride, or that when her laugh was most frequent tears were very near her eyes.

Once her mother laid her hands tenderly on the child's shoulders, and looking earnestly into the pretty eyes, said,—

"Is this my own Scamp still?" and she answered gaily,—

"Yours now and always, mamma. Why do you ask such out-of-the-way questions?"

"I was afraid for you, dear; and oh, child! child! I could not bear to think of your life darkened almost at its dawn."

"I am very happy," the girl answered, gently. "You are all so good to me," and then she had gone away to her room to weep and pray in wildest anguish; but she had made her mother glad, and for that she was content to suffer in silence.

Three days passed, and Anthony was expected home. All Buttermere was on the *qui vive* to see the wife about whom there were such vague floating rumours, and most of the gossips found some pretext that day to walk in the direction of the station.

"The Woodhursts are expected at noon," said Tom, coming upon Scamp, who was busily engaged tying a scarlet handkerchief over her dog's head.

She waited until she had settled it to her satisfaction, then remarked, carelessly,—

"I think Hal said something about their coming. Miserable day for travelling, is it not? There, Mr. Logan, acknowledge if you please that Rip is simply bewitching in her new gear!"

She had recently adopted quite different tactics with regard to Tom, sagely reflecting that, according to her treatment of him, Anthony would suffer; and Tom, who understood the girl less and less every day, was delighted at the change in her.

"You spoil that puppy," he said now, in answer to her last speech. "She will be fit for nothing but a lap dog."

"Oh, nonsense! and I hate lap dogs, as you should know, Mr. Logan. How far off is Christmas, and do you spend it at home?"

"Does that mean you wish me to go?" he asked, wrathfully.

"Nothing of the kind!" mendaciously. "Men are so scarce at Buttermere that every one is regarded as a blessing when the charade and theatrical season draws near."

"You mean, then, you wish me to stay?" delightedly.

"Mr. Logan, I will not foster your vanity. Gracious powers, what does all that shouting mean?"

"The yokels are welcoming Mrs. Woodhurst to her home. How she has the impertinence to put in an appearance is a puzzle to me. Miss Violet, aren't you curious to see her?"

He was looking fixedly at her as he spoke; so she rose, and still with the dog in her arms walked to the window, slowly and indifferently.

Anthony was driving, and he never glanced towards the Vicarage.

Scamp could scarcely repress a cry when she saw his worn and aged face, and she had not the faintest notion of Mrs. Woodhurst's appearance—they were passed so quickly. She had caught only the sheen of dead-gold hair, the flash of a scarlet plume, as the dog-cart whirled round a bend in the road.

"Gad! she is awfully pretty!" said Tom. "Don't you think so?"

"Certainly; and she has magnificent hair," answered the girl, who had no idea of what manner of woman Anthony's wife was.

"Doesn't look temperate—rather the reverse," Tom went on, still watching his companion closely.

Scamp yawned. "Probably she has quite conquered her bad propensity. Heigho! it doesn't sound very romantic, but I am terribly hungry. Is lunch never to be announced?"

"She never could have cared for him," Tom decided, "or she is awfully awful. I am inclined to believe, however, that she was only coquetting with him," and his belief gave him utmost satisfaction.

The following day Anthony called with his wife.

"You have been so good to me that I felt I owed it to you to present Mrs. Woodhurst to you first," he said, gravely; and then as Scamp lifted her eyes, she saw, as through a mist, a pretty woman of medium height, with deep blue eyes, a complexion pink and white as a baby's, and a mass of waving dead-gold hair.

As she so graciously smiled and spoke, it seemed incredible to those who knew her story she could ever have sunk to the dreadful depths Anthony had described.

She took Scamp's little hand in hers, and said, with the prettiest, faintest accent imaginable,—

"I hope we will be very good friends, Miss Hesketh. I have no sisters, and it must be terribly dull at Buttermere unless one has congenial companions."

And Scamp answered something (she did not know what), whilst all her poor heart was torn and bleeding with the bitter battle she was waging with herself.

In the early days of her coming to Buttermere Mrs. Woodhurst behaved with beautiful propriety, and Anthony fondly hoped that she had utterly conquered the old, evil habit. For her sake he denied himself wine, utterly refused to allow it a place upon his table; and although he had no love for her, he considered her every wish, waited upon her pleasure, striving in all things to make her life bright and glad.

He surrounded her with pleasant companions; and Scamp, remembering her promise to help him in any and everything where help was possible, was a frequent visitor at the Manor. Nora Woodhurst had conceived a violent affection for her, and was never so content as when the Vicar's daughter spent long hours with her; but Scamp was careful

to time her visits so that she rarely met Anthony—that was an ordeal she dared not often risk.

In this fashion life went on at Buttermere quietly enough until spring came, and with the spring great doings, because the son of a county magnate then attained his majority. The Heskeths and Woodhursts were among the guests invited, and Nora had taken especial pains with her toilet, which was of some blue and silver material; she was really as fond of Anthony as her nature permitted her to be of any creature, and she wished to do him credit.

She looked a strikingly pretty woman as she entered the brilliantly lit ball-room, and she was quickly besieged by partners, who found her very bright and amusing, for she had all an Irishwoman's ready, sparkling wit; and those who had no knowledge of her past considered Anthony a very lucky fellow.

Scamp was there in robes of virginal white, without a fleck of colour to mar their purity, and she looked like a lovely young bride in the midst of that brilliantly-dressed throng. Once she danced with Anthony for the sake of appearances; but the dance being over she returned at once to her mother's side.

It was now the middle of the evening, and Mrs. Woodhurst, who had danced indefatigably, had gone with her partner to the refreshment room.

"Scamp," said her mother, "when Mrs. Woodhurst returns, please tell me if you think her manner is natural. I don't wish to be uncharitable, but I am afraid she has been taking more wine than is good for her. She is constantly returning to the refreshment room!"

"Oh, mamma, no! She has not done such a thing since her return. She is very excitable, and you may be mistaken."

"I hope I am for her own sake, but most for Anthony. If it is so we must contrive to get her away before others notice her condition."

As she spoke Nora re-entered with her partner, and Scamp's heart sank as she looked at her. The heavy golden hair had become loosened, the fair face was flushed, and she looked like the portrait of a Bacchante.

With a vast pity for the wretched woman the girl stepped forward as she approached, and remarking, in a low voice,—

"Pardon me, there is something I wish to say to you. Will you sit down beside me, please?" She drew Nora to a seat, and looking at her with kind eyes, asked, "Dear Mrs. Woodhurst, will you not rest a little? You are excited—and—and not quite well. Or shall we go into the conservatory; it will be cooler there?"

Nora looked at her in a half-seared, half-sullen fashion.

"What do you mean?" she demanded in a low voice.

"Oh, do not force me to use plainer language," said Scamp, distressfully. "For your husband's sake let there be no scandal. Dear, dear, Mrs. Woodhurst, I entreat you either to remain by us, or to leave now, before you excite attention!"

"There is nothing the matter with me, and I consider your interference impertinent," answered the other in husky tones; and then Mrs. Hesketh spoke,—

"I am sorry I allowed my daughter to speak to you on the subject; but I was wishful to save an ancient name from disgrace. Personally, I have no interest in you. Come, Violet, we have meddled to no purpose!"

Now, Nora stood somewhat in dread of the Vicar's stately wife, and then she was fond of Scamp, so she said hastily,—

"Do not go, I am very sorry I spoke so rudely—and I will go home if Anthony will take me. Where is he?"

"Coming towards us now. Oh, Anthony, you have come in the very nick of time; Mrs. Woodhurst is not feeling very well, and desires to go home."

The man shot one quick, suspicious glance

from Mrs. Hesketh's pale, refined face to his wife's, so unnaturally flushed, and set his lips hard, lest he should say words that on the morrow he might regret. In a moment he had recovered his ordinary manner.

"Thank you for the care you have taken of Nora. Come, we will go at once." Bowing to Violet and her mother he tendered his wife his arm, and so drew her almost unperceived from the room.

"Oh, mamma, it is too awful! Can nothing be done for her?"

"If her love for Anthony, her regard for her position, will not keep her from this degrading vice, nothing will. Poor child! I am afraid the night is spoiled for you."

"No, mamma, I am only a little tired, and shall be glad to rest. I am unused to so much gaiety."

She was glad indeed when Mrs. Hesketh ordered their carriage, and throughout the homeward drive she spoke no word. Reaching the Vicarage she said,—

"You will not mind if I go to my room at once? I think I never was so fatigued. Good-night, and pleasant dreams."

Then she went away and up to her own chamber; but however weary she was she did not seek her bed for long hours.

Until morning broke she knelt in all her pretty finery before her open window, praying with tears for Anthony and his wretched wife, asking that the way might be made plain for her to help Nora against herself.

Then, as the light broadened and brightened, she, rising, stripped herself of lace and silk and jewels, and crept like a weary child to bed, there to fall into an uneasy sleep, and wake again unrefreshed, uncomfortable.

CHAPTER V.

ALAS! alas! for Anthony's peace and for her own good name, Nora having once broken her promise, once given rein to her wild desire, found it beyond her strength to stop in her downward course.

Day after day Anthony found her either in a stupid or hilarious condition, and by her cunning she outwitted all his precautions.

All the servants were forbidden, on pain of instant dismissal, to procure any alcoholic drink for their unhappy mistress; and Anthony had no reason to doubt their integrity.

Still, by means known best to herself, Nora contrived to procure fiery liquors and rich wines.

It was nothing to her that daily her beauty was slipping from her, that her features were coarsening, and her eyes losing their natural light.

The curse of her family had indeed fallen upon her, and she would almost have sold her soul to satisfy her awful craving.

By and by it began to be whispered through the village that Mrs. Woodhurst had returned to her old evil ways, and folks fought shy of her. Visitors at the Manor grew less frequent, and Anthony went about like a man who has lost all hope, all desire in life.

Remonstrances, threats, entreaties were in vain, and Mrs. Hesketh began to object to her daughter's intimacy with her.

"I will not have your name connected with hers," she said. "She is an utterly worthless woman, and you cannot help her if you would."

So Scamp remained at home, sore at heart for Anthony, but carrying herself bravely before the world; getting into mischief as she used to do teasing Hal, alternately smiling and frowning on Tom, behaving, in fact, like a very wilful and happy child.

It was at the house of a mutual acquaintance they met, and Scamp was shocked at the change in Nora's appearance; but she greeted her kindly, especially as she saw that many ladies bore themselves coldly towards her.

"It is very long since you came to the Manor?" Nora said, and even her voice

seemed changed and coarsened. "Why is it you neglect me so?"

Poor Scamp! The hot blood flushed her face and throat crimson, but she answered with tolerable calmness,—

"I have been so busy helping on with the Sunday School Treat arrangements."

"A lame excuse," said Nora, quickly. "Once you would not have allowed any work to keep you from me. Miss Hesketh—is it—is it—because you have heard all they are saying about me? I don't care. I hurt no one but myself, and it is my only comfort, my only pleasure in this deadly, lively place. Week in week out I live alone; Anthony hates me! Oh, yes, I know he does—and so I fly to drink as a refuge from thought."

She was growing terribly excited, and Scamp was afraid that some of the guests would attribute her manner to the wrong cause.

"For Heaven's sake," she said, under her breath, "calm yourself! Oh, if you will only promise to keep quiet I will come to the Manor to-morrow, and any day you wish. Are you satisfied?"

"Yes, dear, yes!" And in her maudlin tenderness she would have kissed the girl, but Scamp drew back hastily, and so avoided the threatened and loathed caress.

It so happened that the two were placed far apart at table, and Scamp had no opportunity of watching or guarding Nora. She did not see how often her glass was replenished, and the babble of voices prevented her hearing how pleasant was Nora's frequent laugh, how uncertain her tone and words momentarily grew.

But when the hostess gave the signal to rise she saw it all—the flushed, disfigured face, the vacant eyes and idiotic smile, the tangle of falling golden hair, and Scamp could have cried out in her anguish of pain and pity.

Nora staggered towards the door, smiling meaninglessly. Then those who saw Anthony's face at that moment never forgot the utter horror and disgust upon it.

He made one forward step, then catching his wife by the waist, turned upon the assembled party, and a strange laugh broke from his pallid lips. If he had not laughed he must have wept aloud.

"My wife is not well," he said. "You will excuse our hasty and unceremonious departure," and it seemed the words would choke him.

Nora struggled a little in his embrace, but he held her in a violike grip, and bore her into the hall, down the steps, she laughing and crying like a wild thing all the while.

The hostess was furious at the spoiling of her entertainment, her guests depressed and disgusted by what they had seen; and Scamp, who dared not plead Nora's cause, even if she had felt justified in doing so, heard the dowagers determine henceforth to boycott Mrs. Woodhurst, neither to visit nor receive her—and she could not blame them for their resolution. But oh! what would Anthony do—condemned to spend all his days with a drunken and sometimes violent woman? She grew pale thinking of him and his woe, and her own powerlessness to help him.

That night she could not sleep for her sad and bitter thoughts.

"Oh, my dear! oh, my dear!" she moaned. "There is nothing I can do to lighten your load—nothing, nothing! And I think I could die to save you from the despair which is snapping away your strength, making you broken and old before your time."

In the morning she went downstairs very pale and distraught. The rest of the family were already at breakfast, and, naturally, the topic of their conversation was the event of the previous evening.

"I should think Woodhurst will cut the whole concern now. He will hardly care to face the county folks after last night's affair," said Logan.

"Why not?" drawled Hal, who for a long

while had maintained an aggressive attitude towards his father's pupil.

"Because of the shame of the whole thing. Of course no one will recognise Mrs. Woodhurst after her escapade."

"And the husband is to suffer for the wife's sin?" "Pon my word, Logan, yours is a charitable creed!"

"It's the world's creed, anyhow. And how can you recognise a man and ignore his wife? Woodhurst must have been a fool to marry her!"

"He isn't the only one in the world. I'll warrant you he don't feel at all lonely. The family is a large one."

Logan flushed under Hal's blunt words.

"Perhaps you'll set up a defence for the woman next?" he said, savagely.

"No, I shan't; but for all that I'm not going to pelt her now she is down. I'll bet a level dollar she isn't too happy!"

"Suppose," remarked Mrs. Hesketh, "we change the subject. It is not worth your while to quarrel over it. Scamp, my dear, you look tired; why did not you keep your room?"

"I was sick of staring out of the window at a cloudless sky and green trees. I am inclined to believe that late hours do not agree with my fragile constitution (this with a little mirthless laugh). This morning I am as tired as the proverbial dog, and as cross as two sticks. I think if Hal would confess he is in a like case."

"I am infernally savage!" retorted that young man; and having finished his breakfast he bounced out of the room, and took up quarters in the study, where he was quickly followed by Mr. Hesketh and Tom.

"My dear!" said Mrs. Hesketh, finding herself alone with her daughter, "you will not try to set aside my decision not to allow you to visit again at the Manor? However great our pity for that unhappy woman may be, we owe it to ourselves to keep our names unspotted. You cannot touch pitch without being defiled. You believe I am acting for your good?"

"Mamma, yes; but it is very hard."

"It is hard, and I fear the worst has not come for Anthony. Poor fellow! poor fellow! There, do not distress yourself thinking of these things. Lie down, and try to sleep whilst I give cook a few necessary orders."

Mrs. Hesketh lowered the blinds, and drew the curtains close, fondly hoping Scamp would get a little rest. But sleep was not for the girl; and being left alone she sprang impatiently to her feet.

"I can't rest! I can't rest! My brain is in a whirl, and I am so miserable, so miserable!" With hasty hands she pushed back the falling hair, and taking advantage of her mother's absence, stole out into the grounds.

It was a lovely summer day. All nature seemed to mock at misery, to speak only of full and perfect joy.

From the distance came the scent of new-mown hay, the lowing of the cattle, the faint echo of childish happy laughter. Usually, Scamp revelled in these things, but now they only irritated her; and longing for utter silence she escaped to the churchyard.

It was quieter there. Only the wind went sighing through the trees, the soft breezes rushed the little grasses about the lowly graves.

Scamp sat down upon a rough bench beneath a huge oak, and resting her head upon the gnarled trunk gave herself up to painful thought.

As she sat there, dreaming impossible plans for Nora's salvation and Anthony's comfort, she heard the sound of hasty steps in the long ripe grass, and, opening her weary eyes, saw Anthony before her.

He was so white, so agitated, that she could find no word to say—could not so much as rise to meet him.

"Violet!" he breathed rather than said, "do not send me away without a comforting word. I think I am going mad, and all my

strength is slipping from me." He held out his hand as he spoke; it shook as though with ague.

"Sit down," she said, calmed by the sight of his agitation. "Sit down and tell me all. Has anything occurred to grieve and anger you?"

He hid his tortured face in his hands.

"You saw her last night. That is how I see her day after day, until in my heart I grow to hate her, and wonder what madness prompted me to make her my wife. How we reached home I do not know, but I contrived in some way to get her to her room, she shrieking and laughing all the while. Then she fell into a drunken slumber, and as I looked upon her, listened to her stertorous breathing, the temptation came upon me to kill her as she lay!"

"Oh! no, no, no, Anthony!" the girl cried, wildly. "Not that—oh! never that!"

"It is the truth!" he answered, half-sullenly, and lifting his face looked at her with haggard, despairing eyes. I could not be more wretched than now I am; and surely there is small sin in ridding the world of one so fallen, so degraded as—my wife!"

"No sin! Oh, you shall not blind yourself so wilfully to the enormity of the crime you would commit. Would you send that poor soul to meet her doom without time or chance for repentance? Would you lift your hand against a helpless fellow-creature? And, oh! may Heaven forgive me if I err in impressing my own small, poor claim for pity upon you. What would my life be if I could remember you only as the murderer of the woman you once loved and honoured? Anthony, I beseech you, here upon my knees, have mercy upon yourself and me. Promise me, by all you hold sacred, that you will not lift your hand to hurt one hair of her head?"

"You do not realise the awful strength of my temptation. You are too pure, too tender of heart to understand how completely the devil has me in his grasp, until I scarce can keep my hands from off her throat!"

"Heaven help you both," moaned the girl. "Heaven grant I may never live to know the black and bitter deed is done," and then she hid her face in her hands and sobbed aloud, whilst he looked down upon her with mournful, brooding eyes, having no comfort to offer, and not so much as daring to touch her little slender hands.

In that moment's anguish he had no word to say; but presently she grew quiet, for Scamp was never weak for long, and in an unsteady voice she said,—

"Under no other circumstances would I speak of myself and my suffering. It is, perhaps, just I should be so sorely punished because my very love is a sin; but because of that love, because of the desolation it has wrought in my life, I pray you to fly this awful temptation whilst you may. There is safety in flight. Oh, then go! go! and Heaven be with you on your journey, in all your heavy days and hours!"

Whilst she so pleaded with him, whilst her fair face was upraised to his in all its purity and love, the soul within him was shaken to its centre, and it was hard, indeed, for him to hold fast by his manhood—harder still not to speak some word of love and devotion; and his head dropped lower, lower yet, until his face was bowed upon the glory of her shining hair. And as his hands held hers fast and close, he forgot all but the fact that she was with him, and Heaven had mercifully given her to save his soul from crime and despair.

Under her breath he heard her praying for him and for poor lost Nora. There was not one thought of self in her heart then, and a sudden self-scorn possessed him as he realised how brave she was to bear the burden his hands had placed upon her shoulders.

"Child! child!" he said, "you shame me. You so strong and I so weak. Heaven helping me, I will listen no more to that awful, tempting voice. Oh, my darling! oh, my darling!

who never can be mine—you have saved me again and again from my evil self. If ever I make anything of my life, if ever I achieve any good, it will be through your aid, your example," and then he gently raised her, drawing her down on the bench beside him. "You need not fear for me any longer. You have conquered, and Nora is safe. Here where my duty lies I will stay. I will not fly like a coward from my troubles!"

"I knew you would answer well," Scamp said, very gently. "Yours was but a momentary weakness, and you will not falter again. There is so much you can do, so much you have already done for your poorer neighbours. If you go, who will carry on your work? Who will give them the ready help and sympathy you have given? We shall not often meet, it is neither wise nor right that we should, but I shall hear of your goodness, your busy, useful life, and shall be proud to think 'he is my friend.' And now good-bye. Heaven bless and keep you!"

But when she would have loosed her hands he held them fast.

"It will be long before we meet again. Child, will you not kiss me good-bye?"

Her pale face crimsoned, and her lips quivered, but she answered firmly,—

"No; in nothing will I wrong her; and not even for your sake will I forget my own self-respect!"

He urged her no more, but lifting the small hand to his lips, pressed one long kiss upon them; and then without a word of farewell went his way, little thinking that Tom Logan had seen that act of reverence, and construed it according to his wishes.

"So she meets him still," thought the worthy young man, "and she need expect no mercy from me!"

CHAPTER VI.

NORA WOODHURST was considerably surprised when, two days later, Mr. Logan was ushered into her presence at a comparatively early hour.

He had purposely timed his visit to avoid Anthony, and to interview Nora whilst she was yet in a state to understand his communication.

She was lying on a couch, wearing a pink wrapper, and her profuse hair was loose about her neck and shoulders; her face was flushed, her eyes bloodshot, and altogether she presented such a sorry appearance that Logan could scarcely repress a shudder of repulsion.

"I ought to apologise for my untimely visit," he said somewhat awkwardly; "but as I had something of importance to disclose I would not run the risk of meeting other visitors, and perhaps losing all chance of private speech with you, Mrs. Woodhurst."

"Visitors!" echoed Nora, with a harsh laugh. "Like angels' calls they are few and far between at Woodhurst Manor. Even Miss Hesketh never comes now!"

Tom smiled disagreeably.

"I suppose not; she is more pleasantly employed, and it was of Miss Hesketh I came to speak. Are you aware that she is in the habit of meeting Mr. Woodhurst in the churchyard, at the time of day it is most deserted?"

"What!" cried Nora, shrilly; "it can't be true! She is so young, and was always so kind to me, Anthony would not dare!"

But Tom only smiled significantly.

"It can't be true!" urged the poor, jealous creature. "You don't know Anthony. He isn't like other men—he has no vices—you must be mistaken; but I am grateful to you for your good intentions, your kindly thought of me. Only—only—of course it is not true!"

"I beg your pardon, madam. I am an eyewitness to these clandestine meetings, and I came to you hoping you would find means to end them. Nothing but my sincere pity for you, and my wish to save you sorrow, could have induced me to speak."

Nora sprang from her couch, and pro-

ducing a decanter of brandy from a recess, poured out and drank a glass of the fiery liquor before she could collect her thoughts, or steady her shaking limbs. Then she said, excitedly,—

"I see it all now, and I thank you. Oh yes! I thank you for your information. You are my friend—are you not?" here she drained another glass. "You would not deceive me, and—and—I will find a way to punish them both. Oh my head! my poor head!" and then she began to cry in a dreadful maudlin way; and whilst she wept Tom effected his escape.

"I hope she is sober enough to remember all I told her," he thought. "If so she will make matters pretty uncomfortable for her precious husband, and Violet will be glad to shelter herself under my name."

Left alone, the wretched creature brooded over her imaginary wrongs, until she was half mad with them.

She saw it all now—Violet's treachery, Anthony's faithlessness—and in her heart she vowed to punish the girl.

"She is younger and fairer than I," she thought, "and Anthony always loved beauty for beauty's sake. I will spoil her fairness; she shall not triumph over me. She shall lose her charm for Anthony and for all men."

Through two whole days and nights she dwelt upon that thought, drinking deeply, and maintaining a sullen silence towards Anthony.

On the third day she declared herself ill, and scarcely able to rise.

"I shall not live long to trouble you," she said, with half drunken emotion, "and I shall be glad to go, since you are weary of me."

Anthony made no reply. He was too utterly disgusted with life and her for speech to be easy, and Nora went on,—

"If you knew that I was dying you could not refuse my last request?"

"Why do you talk in such a fashion?" he asked, wearily.

"Because, whatever you may say to the contrary, I get weaker every day. Surely I ought to know my own feelings! Promise to do what I ask—it is the last favour I shall ever beg of you."

"If it is not unreasonable you may consider it granted."

"Oh, it is simple enough! Only that you will beg Violet Hesketh to come to me. You must go to her yourself; she will not come for a mere message of mine."

"Why do you wish to see her of all people?"

"Because she was always kind to me, and but for her people she would never have left me to my solitude."

"I will send for her," Anthony said, in the same level, weary tones; "but I am not sure that Mr. Hesketh will permit the visit."

"You must go yourself; they will not deny you—and go now. I shall not rest until I have seen and spoken to her."

"Very well; but you have chosen a poor ambassador," and then he turned and left her; and when the door had closed upon him she laughed, cunningly,—

"I am more than a match for them all! They think I am blind and stupid. The poor fools! the poor fools! It will not be long before they discover their mistake."

Mr. and Mrs. Hesketh received Anthony warmly; the worn face and sombre eyes so plainly telling their tale of woe, appealed to their honest sympathy. Scamp scarcely spoke to him—but it was not that her pity was less keen.

"I am afraid I have come on a fruitless errand," he said, after the first greetings were over. "The fact is Mrs. Woodhurst is ill, and imagines herself dying. She begs that you will allow Miss Hesketh to return with me, as she desires nothing so much as to see her."

The Vicar looked confused. He knew his wife's opinion on the subject, and he thought it right; but then if a minister of Heaven

forgets to practise charity who shall remember to do so?

"My dear, it rests with you to decide," and the lady answered quickly,—

"I think you are aware, Anthony, I would do much for you; but, pardon me, Mrs. Woodhurst has put herself outside the pale of society, and I am naturally averse to any intimacy between her and my child. A young girl cannot be too careful of her fair fame."

He bowed his head in assent. He was too utterly weary to plead with her, or to protest against her decision. But now Scamp spoke in quick, low tones.

"Mamma, let me go; if I can carry her any comfort, if I can be of any help to her, do not forbid me. If you say so, this shall be my last visit to the Manor! But oh! if she should be dying, how bitterly you would reproach yourself for refusing so small a request. Be just to your own kind self, dear!"

The mother took one small, soft hand in her own.

"My dear, you do not know the ways of the world, or how harsh are its judgments. It is for your sake I refuse."

"Forget me a short while, and try to put yourself in her place, alone, forsaken, despised—dying."

"Let the child go," said the Vicar. "She has more of charity than we. And what harm can accrue to her?"

"As you will," Mrs. Hesketh said, but her voice had a displeased ring. "Anthony, you will be careful of her. She is apt to be thoughtless where she herself is concerned; and Scamp, you will not stay late?"

"No, mamma, and thank you so much for yielding to my wishes," and she went away to dress, returning in a few moments fully equipped.

The walk to the Manor was a very silent one.

Anthony led the girl to his wife's room at once. She was lying upon a couch fast asleep.

"Do not disturb her," Scamp said. "I will sit here until she wakes. Leave me alone, please. I shall not mind the quiet."

So she sat by Nora whilst the slow minutes dragged on, and the golden afternoon wore to a close. Then with a yawn and a start Nora woke, turned heavily upon her side, and stared a moment vacantly at her visitor.

"You wanted me," Scamp said, gently. "I have been here a long time. But it seemed such a pity to disturb you, you were sleeping so quietly. Are you better now?"

"Better!" answered the other, leaning on her elbow, and regarding Scamp with lurid eyes. "I never shall be better this side of the grave. How should I be when all round conspire to make me wretched?"

"Oh, no, no! This is surely the fancy of a diseased mind."

"It is no fancy. Does not my husband loath me, wish me dead, so that he were once more free? I might have been a better woman had he loved me more truly."

The hot, indignant blood flamed into the girl's cheeks.

"You know your misery is not of his working. There are few men who would have borne so patiently and gently with you as he has done. But I came neither to reproach you nor discuss your conjugal differences with you, only to help you if I can, and to hear what you have to say. The afternoon is nearly gone, and mamma will be growing anxious about me. Please tell me what it is you wish me to do?"

(At that moment she could not have spoken tenderly to Nora for all the best and brightest gifts on earth.)

"Presently," said Nora. "Do not be so impatient to leave me. Oh, my head!—oh, my head! There is something I have to say, something I wish to do—just now I cannot remember what—but soon it will return to me."

Scamp rose, and bringing eau de cologne,

bathed the burning brow and brushed out the masses of heavy hair.

"Is not that better?" she asked, pausing awhile in her ministrations. "Does not your head ache less?"

"Yes—and it is all coming back to me—all I have to say and do before I go—for I tell you I am a dying woman. No one knows better than myself. But I shall not die alone."

She spoke and looked so strangely that Scamp began to be alarmed, and wished that Anthony would return.

She sat down at some distance from Nora, and tried her best to look courageous, but her heart was beating madly. There was something so awful in Nora's look.

"Shall I call your maid?" she asked, after a painful silence. "I am afraid you are suffering greatly; and she will understand better what to do than I, who have no experience."

"No; I only want you. Why do you sit so far away?"

"It is cooler here by the window. Shall I wheel your couch nearer?"

"No, I shall do very well. Where is Anthony?"

"Out, I believe."

"And the servants, are any of them near? No one must listen to what I have to say to you. We are quite alone?"

"Oh, yes. You may safely confide your story to me now."

"That is well. I wish for no interruption. And not for worlds, my dear Miss Hesketh, would I have your name bandied from lip to lip. All this is between ourselves."

The girl rose hurriedly.

"I do not understand you, Mrs. Woodhurst, and I think I will leave you now. When you are more yourself I will come again. But I will not submit to gratuitous insults."

She was trembling violently, and was sore afraid, although she strove valiantly to hide her fear.

"The truth cannot be an insult. Violet Hesketh, I know you now for what you are! You have not scrupled to steal away my husband's heart whilst you professed friendship for me. You cannot deny that he loves you."

The poor girl hid her face in her hands, but made no reply.

"You cannot deny you are in the habit of meeting him daily," went on Nora, lashing herself into a fury; but here her victim turned fiercely upon her.

"It is a lie! How dare you accuse me of such shameful conduct! I—I think I had better go. I wish I had never come."

"I don't doubt that," sneeringly. "You fancied your flirtation with Mr. Woodhurst was unknown; but I have friends still, and Mr. Logan has warned me against you."

"Mr. Logan!"

"I did not mention names."

"But you did. I know now whom I have to thank for this vile and malicious story. Oh, surely, surely Mrs. Woodhurst, you do not believe it? Upon my honour, I swear it is utterly false."

Nora laughed loudly.

"You have got to prove that. But you will never have the chance to do so."

"What do you mean? No—no, keep back!" as Nora sprang from the couch and went nearer to her. "I have never wittingly wronged you. Mrs. Woodhurst, you would not harm me?"

"I am going to kill you," the other announced calmly. "There's no one near to help you—no one. You did not think I held your secret as now I hold your life in my hands. You never guessed that this would be the end for you and me!" and all the while she was drawing closer to the poor girl, who stared at her with wild eyes, like a fascinated thing, and could not move or cry out. "What a surprise it will be to Anthony to find you lying still and cold. Ha! ha! ha! how I

wish I could see him in that first moment of the shock."

"Ah! Heaven help me!" prayed the girl in her heart, as she realised that she was wholly at the mercy of a madwoman; that if she cried for help that help might come too late to avail her anything. Oh! it was cruel to die thus! How would they bear this dreadful blow at home? And life was sweet, although she had had much sorrow of late, and the future held sweet possibilities of happiness.

"Have pity on me, dear Heaven!" she prayed again, and strength came to her in that moment. Casting off the spell that bound her she sprang towards the bell; but Nora was too quick for her.

With a cry like that of an infuriated beast she rushed upon the girl.

Scamp had barely time to shriek the one word "Help!" before those cruel white fingers closed upon her throat, and she felt her senses failing her, and all grew dark.

When she came to herself it was to find Anthony bending over her, and a group of frightened servants gathered together round her. Struggling to her feet she said,—

"Oh take me home! in mercy take me home!" and then broke into wild hysterical tears and laughter.

"Blimson," said Anthony, hurriedly, to the housekeeper, "take care of her; and you, Stokes, go for Dr. Thorpe, whilst I run over to the Vicarage. Mrs. Hesketh will be growing anxious."

He dared not trust himself to look at or speak to Violet herself, but his voice pierced her bewildered senses, and lifting herself erect she said,—

"No; I will go home. Mother must not be alarmed."

CHAPTER VII.

SHE never could tell how she reached home, or in what fashion she greeted her frightened mother. It was days before she understood anything clearly. The shock to her nerves had been so great that she was quite prostrated, and for the most part unconscious.

She knew little or nothing of her parents' agony of fear, of Hal's watching beside her, or of his listening outside her door at night when others thought he slept. She was blissfully unaware of Tom Logan's remorse of the agonising suspense he endured during these days.

But when a week had passed she woke to find her mother sitting beside her, regarding her with anxious, loving eyes.

"I have been ill," she said, in a weak voice. "Is it long since? Poor mother, how worn you look! What was it happened to me? Nothing is clear to me. I only remember that something dreadful occurred, and I wanted to reach home, but could not."

"Do not think of anything now, darling, but the quickest way to get well."

"But it worries me, that vague impression of horror. It will hurt me less to tell me all the truth than to leave me puzzling my brain over it." Then, with a sudden wild gesture of her hands to her head, "Ah! I remember now—it was Nora. She tried to kill me!" and a strong shudder shook the slender frame. "She was mad!"

"Yes, dear; but do not think any more of her now. Try to bury the past altogether."

"But who saved me?" persisted Scamp. "Was it Anthony?"

"Yes, and he only arrived in time to prevent murder. Oh, my darling! oh, my darling! do not speak of it again. The thought of it only is almost more than I can bear."

"But mother, one question—only one. What has become of her?"

"I will tell you when you are stronger."

"I want to know now. I must know, or I cannot rest."

"Scamp, she has paid the full penalty of her crime. She is dead! She died the following night, a victim to her awful vice. It appears that when she attacked you she was

already suffering from *delirium tremens*. Anthony did all that a mortal could do for her, but physicians and nurses were utterly powerless to help her. On the night of her death, despite the utmost vigilance and care of her attendants, she escaped from her bed, and in so doing knocked down a lamp. Instantly her night-dresses were ignited, and she rushed madly out of the room, and downstairs. Before she could be captured she was badly burned, and death took place two hours later. Yesterday she was buried."

"Poor Nora!" and, turning her face to the wall, she lay silent for a long while. In her heart she was praying for the poor lost woman who had so nearly compassed her death. And when her mother fondly hoped she had fallen asleep she murmured again, "Poor Nora! poor unhappy Nora!" Then, a little later, "Mamma, where is he?"

"He left Battersea en route for America this morning. And now you must talk no more. If you persist, I shall leave you."

In a day or two she had recovered sufficiently to sit up, and Mrs. Hesketh said, cheerfully,—

"You will be able to come down by the close of the week. It will be quite a festive occasion for us, only we must be careful you do not overtax your strength. My dear, you have no idea how kind people have been, what numbers have called daily to inquire for you. Really, I had no idea you were so popular! As for Mr. Logan—well, he has been inconsolable. You know I never liked him, but I feel sure we have all misjudged him cruelly. He is a rough diamond, I suppose; and his woe-begone face, whilst you lay so ill, was enough to touch the hardest heart."

Scamp sat up then, a scarlet spot on either cheek.

"Mamma," she said, quickly, "I must tell you all. I cannot keep the secret longer. But for Mr. Logan that poor soul would never have attempted my life. It was he who lied to her, who inflamed her jealousy—he who heaped indignities upon me; and I will never meet him again. So long as he remains here I shall keep my room."

And then she told the whole story of her interview with Nora, and Mrs. Hesketh listened with growing anger. But she was a just woman and so when Scamp had ended; she said,—

"My dear, this may or may not be true; but you must keep in mind the fact that Mrs. Woodhurst was not then responsible for her actions or words."

"I am convinced she spoke the truth then," the girl answered; and then she proceeded to give an account of the many persecutions to which Tom Logan had subjected her.

"You should have told me these things before," her mother said, as she made a conclusion; "but you may rest assured that you shall not suffer in like manner again."

And then she went to find the Vicar, looking very stern and proud in her righteous anger.

"Albert," she said, "please send for Mr. Logan. He must leave here at once. I refuse to sit down to table with him again."

"My dear! what has he done? I thought you regarded him in a more friendly fashion than you used!"

"Oh, yes, and I hate to think how easily I have been imposed upon. It seems incredible that he could play so vile a part," and she proceeded to tell him the whole story, as Scamp had told it her. And when she had finished she turned to see Hal standing behind her, white of face, with flashing eyes.

"I've heard all you had to say," he announced, coldly. "Now, father, what are you going to do?"

"Send him packing. I am only sorry my cloth prevents me whipping him like the cur he is!"

"I am not open to the same objection," said Hal, as he disappeared, and there was a look on his face which meant mischief.

It was a very bad quarter of an hour that

Tom spent with the Vicar and his wife. He came out from that interview looking too crestfallen and mean for mere words to describe; and going up to his room he began to pack his goods together, wondering miserably all the while what "the governor" would say when he heard the story, for it was considered almost an honour to be admitted into the Vicar's household. Then, too, he had utterly ruined his cause with Violet; he had never reckoned upon Nora divulging his share in the matter. He had nearly brought about the girl's death—he had tried to blacken her fair fame—how could he hope for forgiveness from her—she who had never loved him?

His arrangements being concluded, he stole downstairs and out of the house as noiselessly as possible. He had no wish to be seen of any. There was nothing for him to wait for now, his goods and chattels were to follow him; he had no adieu to make, and never any more would he see Violet's fair face or hold the small, soft hand in his.

He had nothing to hope for; he wanted nothing so much as to escape unseen; but to his disgust Hal was pacing up and down the lawn, carrying a hunting crop, and looking very aggressive. Hearing steps he turned quickly, and in a moment had pounced upon Tom.

"You villain!" he said, in a low, tense tone. "I'll teach you to slander helpless and innocent girls," and down came the crop on Tom's neckless shoulders. He was strong, but Hal was stronger, and the right was on his side. "Thrice he armed who hath his quarrel just," and when Tom finally escaped he was ready to admit the truth of this—at least to his own heart.

Crestfallen, aching in every limb, he turned his back upon the Vicarage, and the Heskeths knew him no more.

Fifteen months had elapsed since Nora's death, and not a word or a line had Violet received from Anthony. But she did not doubt him. He had loved her once—he would love her always. So ran her thought—in his own good time he would return to her. So she was not unhappy or afraid; only at nights when she lay wakeful upon her bed, or by day when she wandered lonely through field and wood, she would say under her breath,—

"I wish that he were here."

This was the one thought possessing her throughout the golden hours of her birthday. If he had but sent her a line to show he remembered it—how happy she would have been!

The day died slowly and reluctantly out, loth to leave a world so fair; and now, when the first faint shades of evening gathered about her, Scamp stood by the wicket gate, thinking of and longing for him. And suddenly through the pale, grey mist, there loomed a figure. Her heart stood still—a thousand voices cried aloud to her, "Anthony! Anthony!" but she could not speak, she could not move. Only as he came nearer she stretched out her hands to him, and a happy sob broke from her lips.

In a moment she was in his arms, his mouth was laid to hers, and then his voice, deep and thankful, full of love and tenderness, said,—

"Thank Heaven, I find you true! Oh, my dear! Heaven make me worthy you!"

The night had passed, and the blessed dawn had come. For them glad days and years, for them perfect love and trust. And the time came when even Anthony could speak pityingly of the poor lost soul, who once had borne his name, who once had claimed his heart; and looking on the fair, sweet, woman he now called wife, he would wonder, humbly, how he had deserved so precious a gift as her dear heart, and strive vainly to show her all that she was and ever would be to him!

[THE END.]

FACETIÆ.

STAGES OF COURTSHIP: Selection—Affection—Inspection—Rejection—Dejection.

MOST people think of the marriage tie that it's knotty, but it's nice.

"A STITCH in the side" make one feel sew badly.

SOME one has made the pertinent reflection that nobody ever hears of some brides after their very gorgeous weddings.

WOMAN may indeed have a sphere that is boundless, but she has to stop when she comes to a barbed-wire fence.

AFTER you have sampled them, there are a good many things in this world which are not what they seemed.

AFFECTION makes the girl of the period utterly ridiculous in the eyes of all sensible people she meets.

WHEN a woman gets a red nose, "her blood is out of order." When a man's nose becomes the same hue, whisky is out of place.

"A MAN'S work is from sun to sun," and woman's work descends from daughter to daughter.

"WHAT a frightfully décolleté animal!" exclaimed Miss Buddington, as she looked at the giraffe.

HE (feeling his way): "I—I wish we were good friends enough for you to—call me by my first name." She (helping him along): "Oh, your last name is good enough for me."

THE man who loves God with all his strength does not sit in the front room and sing while his invalid wife is out in the back yard doing a two-weeks' washing.

THERE is a great deal of talk about the bad colds that people have; it is noticeable that not even an optimist speaks of having a good cold.

"I CAME here," said a youth to a girl, "for a little rest and peace of mind." "Ah!" said she. "You appear to have the piece of mind; when do you expect to get the rest?"

EASILY REDUCED.—Smiley: "Now, remember, I don't want a very large picture." Photographer: "All right, sir. Then please close your mouth."

FATHER: "Well, my son, did you succeed in breaking the new horses so they would stand steam?" Son: "No, father; but I broke the carriage."

PROOF.—"Pork was held in high favour before the Flood." "How do you know?" "Eve was a spare rib and Noah named one of his kids Ham."

"NOAH introduced anarchy into the ark." "What's that?" "Why, I mean that he used an ark-key to lock the door when everything was in."

ABOUT the only item fashionable snobs do not send in to the newspapers for publication is the amount of wages they pay their servants.

WILLIE (who had eaten his apple): "Mabel, let's play Adam and Eve. You be Eve and I'll be Adam." Mabel: "All right. Well?" Willie: "Now you tempt me to eat your apple, and I'll succumb."

"IN what part of the body is the liver?" asked a teacher, while examining the class in physiology; and she was a good deal surprised when the tall boy replied, "South of the lungs."

HE: "Fanny Brown is engaged. Guess who to?" SHE: "What! That stupid, snub-nosed, common little creature? Who on earth is going to be fool enough to marry her?" HE: "Well—er—that ish—I am."

PRISON CHARLIE (to condemned): "My poor man, you are about to die; are you ready for the reaper—Death—that sooner or later must gather us all in?" Condemned: "I don't object to the reaper, it's the twine binder that bothers me!"

Mrs. SLIMPURSE (after a decided refusal): "I know what the matter is. It's because I am poor. You would marry me if I were rich." Miss Gattie (thoughtfully): "Perhaps so, but you would have to be very, very rich."

Mrs. DE STYLE: "That cloak is just lovely, so soft and warm. Is it fashionable?" Dealer: "No, ma'am, it's called the Common Sense Cloak." Mrs. De Style (with a sigh): "Let me see your Parisian shoulder capes."

"I HAVE thought of one or two clever things in my lifetime," said Mashington, "but I didn't say them." "Why not?" "It would have been such a deuced disappointment whenever I opened my mouth afterwards."

LITTLE GIRL (at school): "What did the teacher send you here for?" Little Boy: "She said I was bad, and must come over and sit with the girls." "I like you. Can you stay long?" "Guess not. I wasn't very bad." "Well, you be badder next time."

Mrs. SPRIGGS: "How careful your little boy is of his health! My boy is constantly running out in all sorts of weather, without overcoat or overhaos, no matter what I say. How do you manage?" Mrs. Briggs: "When my boy catches cold I give him cod liver oil."

Biggs: "I don't usually care for De Squibb's work. I'm seldom in the mood for anything pathetic." Boggs: "Pathetic! I thought De Squibb's efforts were generally in the humorous line." Biggs: "They are; that's what makes 'em pathetic."

REDKISS (as he returns his fellow-traveller's flash): "My dear sir, that makes me a new man. I'm infinitely obliged to you. I wish I had a thousand threats to thank you." Fellow-Traveller (looking ruefully at his flash): "I'm very glad you haven't."

THE Arabs have no "hello!" in their language. The nearest they come to it is to throw a stone and hit a man in the back, and then ask him as he turns around: "Does it please Heaven to give you good health this morning?"

"THAT woman is never at home. She seems to have merely married a rich man so that she could have time and means to follow out her mission." "That's just it. She goes around the country lecturing on how to make home attractive."

VISITING AUNT: "Why in the world do you buy such mannish-looking clothes? You surely can't think the things pretty." Lovely Niece: "No, aunty, they're not pretty, and I don't wear them much." Aunt: "Then why do you get them?" Niece: "Oh, it's such a comfort to see them around."

PEDDLER: "Please, mum, I'm sellin' a polish to clean silver." Housekeeper (sharply): "Don't want none." Peddler: "Very sorry, mum, but I see the neighbours was right. They said there was no use callin' here 'cause you didn't have no silver." Housekeeper (wildly): "Gimme six boxes."

MOTHER: "What is the matter, Clara? You look distressed." Clara (a bride): "George has—has had to go off on a—trip, and he won't be back for—for two days—boo-hoo!" Same Mother (some years later): "How long will your husband be away?" Same Clara: "I forgot to ask."

"CHARLIE, dear, what is a monopoly?" she asked, looking up tenderly as she rested submissively in his arms, with her dainty head nestled against his coat-collar. "Well," replied Charlie, manfully struggling to bring his mind to cope with abstruse subjects and failing altogether to get beyond concrete facts, "I sincerely hope that this is!"

A WAYFARER lately in a primitive part of Kent inquired of a rustic whom he met whether there was a doctor near, as he had hurt his foot and wanted it looked to. "Doctor, sir?" said the man, with a knowing shake of his head. "There ain't no such thing about here. If we sprains ourselves or has the toothache, we goes to the blacksmith; but, thank Heaven, we all dies natural deaths!"

SOCIETY.

PIANO and organ tuning is an occupation recently adopted by women.

THE strangest combinations in colour are now worn in ferial dresses, and the latest on record is a mixture of pale blue and mauve.

THE women of Queensland, Australia, are petitioning the colonial secretary for the appointment of police matrons.

SEALS and sealing-wax are coming in again, and they have a charming flavour of the old-world time, when leisure was not so unattainable a luxury as now.

IT is by no means certain that the Queen will leave England at all this spring. Her Majesty, although liking the idea of the change, rather dreads the journey.

THE Earl of Rosebery is on the Continent. The seclusion of Mentmore after his recent bereavement preyed rather upon his mind, and his doctor ordered change of scene. The little Ladies Primrose are very well.

CREMATION is, by the way, now becoming all the rage, so fashionable, indeed, that some of our social leaders are ordering designs to be made for their urns.

THE salary of the infant King of Spain is £150,000 a year.

IF spots and freckles are driven from the face and neck they seek refuge in the hand, and defy any attempt to remove them.

THERE is a library for women in Turin. The rooms are beautifully furnished, and tables are covered with periodicals and newspapers from all quarters of the globe; while the shelves are filled with the best modern books.

THE Queen has had several dinner parties recently. Her Majesty has been in excellent spirits and fairly satisfactory health. The changes of climate which have occurred lately have proved trying to the Queen, and have brought on rather severe returns of the rheumatic affection from which Her Majesty so often suffers.

THE Empress Elizabeth is to be the favoured lady—not the wife of the President of the French Republic—who is to receive this year the Golden Rose from the Pope, as he says he wishes to make amends for her Majesty not being able to visit him at the Vatican, and also to offer her a token of the sympathy which he feels for her in the affliction she has undergone in the death of her son.

THE Queen has just presented a magnificent elephant to the Emperor of Morocco. The animal was purchased in India expressly for the purpose; and it was brought from Calcutta in a P. and O. steamer to Gibraltar, whence it was conveyed in H.M.S. *Phaeton* to Mazagan, on the way to Fez. The elephant is splendidly caparisoned, and mounted with a sumptuous howdah.

IT is said in usually well-informed circles that the Duke of Fife is to have the vacant Garter. A good deal of disappointment has been felt in society at the lack of those lavish entertainments which were anticipated from the Prince's wealthy son-in-law, but murmuring is ungracious when it is remembered that the condition of the Duchess's health has been the cause.

THERE is no end to the variety of vices. One of the latest is "the ginger habit." The victim becomes a slave to ginger just as others become the slaves of tobacco, whisky, or opium. Ginger essence contains twice as much alcohol as whisky, and is resorted to by old toppers on whom whisky no longer has any effect. Many women are addicted to the ginger habit, and it is acquired by the free use of ginger for colic and cramps.

STATISTICS.

IT is estimated that 8,000,000,000 letters go through the world's post-offices in one year.

THE length of Indian telegraph lines open is now 35,462 miles.

A PENNY changes hands 125,000 times in the course of its life.

IN the United States no man may legally be married before the age of 21, nor women before the age of 18.

A HEALTHY man respires 16 or 20 times a minute, or over 20,000 a day; a child 25 or 35 times a minute.

GEMS.

THE chains of habit are generally too small to be felt till they are too strong to be broken.

NOTHING is so indicative of deepest culture as a tender consideration of the ignorant.

IF you put your eyes on your neighbour's row the weeds will grow up in your own.

SO much can be accomplished in a day, it is foolish to become discouraged while one day of life is left us.

TRoubles spring from idleness, and grievous toils from needless ease. Many without labour would live by their own wits only; but they break for want of stock.

WHEN you make a mistake, don't look back at it long. Take the reason of the thing into your own mind, and then look forward. Mistakes are lessons of wisdom. The past cannot be changed; the future is yet in your power.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

LEMON PIE.—Three eggs, a cup and a half of sugar, the pulp and grated rind of two lemons. These are the ingredients of a pie most delicious to the taste.

OYSTER TOAST.—This is a nourishing dish. Put one pint of oysters on to cook in a stew-pan, and when they begin to simmer add a piece of butter half as large as an egg, a half pint of milk, and a little salt and pepper. Let it all come to a boil. Have ready six slices of home-made bread toasted, lay them in a deep dish. Put on each slice some oysters and sauce; a little more milk may be needed.

HASHED BEEF OR MUTTON.—Cut the meat in very thin slices, and flour both sides; put it in a deep dish, add thinly sliced raw potatoes in alternate layers, and sprinkle each layer with salt and pepper. When the meat and potatoes are all laid in the dish, put an onion in the centre; cut in quarters, and stick one clove in each quarter. Pour over the whole some gravy or water thickened with flour to which a piece of butter has been added. Cover close with an old plate, and bake slowly two hours.

FISH SOUP.—Fish, parsley, onions, butter, flour, milk. This is an excellent fish soup, and may be made with less water, and more like a dish of fish. Get a few fish heads or a bit of any cheap, coarse fish, cleanse them thoroughly (everybody understands that), and put them in a pot with eight breakfast cupfuls water; get a small handful of parsley, wash and pick it, put all the stalks into the pot, put the leaves aside in the meantime, and two onions chopped. Let it boil for about an hour, strain it and put it back in the pot. Now take a fish about 1lb. weight, the head should have been boiled with rest; cut the fish in neat little pieces; put in the pot. Let it boil gently for five minutes, or a little more if necessary; add the parsley chopped, boil for a minute, then add pepper and salt.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE number of exiles in Siberia this year amounts to sixteen thousand souls.

THE Victoria Cross carries with it a pension of £50 a year for life.

SALT water is slightly heavier than fresh water.

THE Dutch people consume more tobacco per head than the people of any other country.

ODDLY enough, barge horses are longer-lived than carriage horses.

WATER is so cold in Iceland that the sensation of putting your hand in it is the same as putting it into boiling water.

"HELIGOLAND" is being translated from English into German by means of the paint pot. In future each street will be "strasse" and so on.

SIR JOHN LUBBOCK kept a queen bee for 15 years, a test proving her eggs to be just as fertile at that age as they were 12 years before.

"THE earliest complete clock of which there is any certain record was made by a Saracen mechanic towards the middle of the thirteenth century."

THE sacred writings of the Chinese, comparing with our Bible, are called the "Five Kings," the word "Kings" meaning word of cloth. It can be traced back to about the year 1100 B.C.

THE authorities at Somerset House are now hard at work preparing for taking the census. About 8,000,000 schedules are, it is said, required for England and Wales, and 40,000 enumerators will be required.

IT is stated that since the sunflower has been cultivated on certain swamps of the Potomac, malarial fever has decreased. Similar results have been observed in Holland, at the mouth of the Scheldt.

SIMULTANEOUS observations taken in all parts of the country show that nearly all great storms follow the same general direction—from the west to the east. The same is true of cold or hot waves. Therefore, to tell what the weather will be, in advance, we have only to find out the conditions that prevail west of us. This is practically the course pursued by signal service.

THEY have a curious but effective method of dealing with inebriates in the Argentine Republic. An English clerk who had gone thither to seek his fortune was arrested at Rosario for being intoxicated. Instead of being let off on payment of a fine, the unhappy wight was sentenced to sweep the streets for eight days. So humiliating did he feel this penalty to be that he quitted the country.

IT is a sad commentary upon our civilisation that only one person in eighty has sound teeth, and the statement is made that two hundred years ago the proportion of a perfect set of teeth was one in every five. Very hot drinks and very cold drinks have the same effect on the enamel of the teeth that they would have on a fine glass goblet; and the biting of threads and the cracking of nuts, it goes without saying, are undesirable exercises for the teeth.

IT is an age of combinations, and this time it is the much-abused domestic servant who is determined to combine to defend her rights. The "Provident and Protective Servants' League" is already started, and has a local habitation and a definite programme. Its object is to gather into its ranks the best class of domestic servants, and thus afford some guarantee to mistresses of honesty and capability. It will, moreover, insure servants against loss through illness or want of employment by means of a system of servants' savings-banks, institutes, and homes. At the same time, there is a whisper of an agitation in favour of shorter hours of work and a weekly half-holiday.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

A HYDE READER.—The marriage is quite legal if it was properly performed and witnessed.

J. H.—Easter may fall as early as March 23, or as late as April 25.

IN DEBT.—Furniture cannot be distrained for groceries supplied.

SARAH ANN.—Affidavit proceedings may be taken within twelve months of the last payment on account of the child.

PRETTY FANNY.—Sleeves are growing longer for demitasse and street-wear, and in some instances actually half cover the hand.

TWO YORKSHIRE LADIES.—We hardly understand what it is you want. A newsagent would be the best person to apply to.

OVER THE BORDER.—The badge of the Scottish clan Cameron was a sprig of oak; of the clan Gordon, ivy; of the clan Stewart, thistle; of the clan Sutherland, cat-tail.

CLARA.—It is not true that one-half of the human race die in infancy. About one-quarter of all the children born die before they pass their seventh year, and one-half before they are eighteen.

OLD SUBSCRIBER.—The form of oath binding on the Mohammedan conscience is to make the Koran rest on the head while the oath is administered. But if the Koran is skilfully held just above the head the form is not valid, and the oath not binding.

GREY HEAD.—The fact that some persons begin to show grey hairs while in their twenties does not indicate a premature decay of the constitution. It is purely a local phenomenon, and often co-exists with great physical vigour.

SWAIN.—It might be advisable for you to take a course of lessons from some teacher who helps on adult pupils. There are many who devote their evenings to such work, and a few hours weekly would soon pull you through your difficulties.

VIOLET HAY.—1. You cannot do anything to darken your eyebrows permanently. Pencils for the purpose are used by those on the stage. 2. The young lady has plenty of time before her, and will probably grow. 3. The writing is very childish.

TALLANT.—It is calculated that there are now living in different parts of the world about six million two hundred thousand Jews. Sixty-two thousand, or one in a hundred of the whole number, reside in Great Britain.

VOLAPUK.—The life of a bee depends upon how much work it does. In the busy summer months they do not live much more than thirty or forty days, but in the winter, when resting in a half-asleep state, they may live six months. In the summer season they lead lives of the greatest activity.

B. GARNY.—We never, under any circumstances, reply to our correspondents through the post. It is against our rules. You had better not attempt to write verses just yet. A little more experience in the art of composition is necessary before you can do anything which will be suitable for printing.

TENANT.—It is assumed that a furnished house is let in a state fit for occupation, and it has been held where serious defects (bad drainage, for example) are disclosed, the tenant may rescind the contract, leave the place, and refuse to pay rent. In case of dispute, of course, each case may be decided on its merits, by action to recover the rent.

THE OWL.—The object of sufficiently clothing a horse is not only to improve his coat, but there is in addition a wonderful saving of food, vigour, condition, and animal heat. The chief loss of the heat of the body is from radiation from its surface. This waste can be lessened and controlled very largely by judicious blanketing.

D. BROOK.—1. The usual exercises in a gymnasium will prove of benefit to you. 2. To increase your weight partake of food containing the most starch and sugar. 3. A single man can live quite comfortably on the salary named, provided, of course, if he be prudent and economical. 4. Your handwriting is good enough for any purpose. It reflects credit upon you.

FOND OF THE BOOK.—Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," is now eighty years old. She lives, says a correspondent, in Hartford, U.S.A., and is in perfect physical health, though her memory is a little clouded, but that only occasionally. Mark Twain's house adjoins Mrs. Stowe's, and the two enjoy many an hour of conversation.

RAM.—Waves are deceptive—water does not travel; it stays in the same place and the motion goes on. Sometimes, in storms, waves are forty feet high. The base of a wave—the distance from valley to valley on either side at the bottom—is reckoned fifteen times the height. A wave twenty feet high, for instance, has a base extending over 300 feet.

ALPHA.—1. There is said to be no means of ascertaining at what period iron began to be used in England, but there is authentic evidence to show that iron works were established by the Romans in the Forest of Dean, in Gloucestershire, and other parts of the kingdom. 2. The use of brass seems to have been known before that of iron. It was spoken of soon after Rome was founded, Numa, the successor of Romulus forming the workers of it into a sort of community.

D. D.—The case is one for the decision of the Court, but the I O U is evidence of debt.

REX.—Write to the Patent Office, 25, Southampton-buildings, London, W.C.

VERITAS.—The whole of the city of Birmingham is in Warwickshire.

JOSEPHINE.—Queen Victoria was born in Kensington Palace on May 24, 1819.

BROTHER JACK.—In launching a ship the stern of the vessel is water-borne before the stem leaves the ways.

NAD.—Thrush and throats are two names for the same bird.

VARNA.—If the children are in possession of the furniture, &c., belonging to their deceased parents, they are to that extent liable for the debts.

MRS. BEST.—If the tenant removes openly, and without any sign to defraud the landlord, his goods cannot be followed and distrained on.

PUZZLED.—The money must stand in the name of the executors, but if loss is incurred through changing investments they will be liable to make it good.

CAVALRY.—Height of Hussar is 5 feet 5 inches, with 34 inch chest. Depot of 13th is at Jock's Lodge, Edinburgh, where recruits are drilled.

JOHNIE.—The distance from Liverpool to New York is 3,016 miles, and from Portsmouth to Madeira 1,330 miles.

BERTHA.—A girl is counted a woman when she "puts her hair up"—ceases to wear it over her shoulders as in childhood.

ELEAN.—A brother is not responsible for the debts of his deceased sister unless he is in possession of any property left by her.

YORKSHIRE DIK.—The explosion at Oakes Colliery, near Barnsley, was on December 12, 1866. About three hundred and sixty persons were killed.

SOME POPULAR FALLACIES.

"Love levels all things"—so "tis freely said;
Yet lover never had a level head.

"None but the brave"—again—"deserves the fair."
Only the brave to live with them would dare.

Some think that absence makes the heart grow fond;
But presents will be found a surer bond.

If "fools rush in where angels fear to tread,"
That's why in life and love the fool's ahead.

"A good thing needs no puffing." Try it, then,
Upon your choice Havana, smoking men.

"Figures won't lie." Who said it was not fly?
There's Salie's figure is a living lie!

"What one man loses is another's gain!"
You lose your temper to your neighbour's pain.

"A fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind,"
Not when a fellow feels your purse to find.

"A gentle answer turneth wrath away."
Best trust your legs and scoot from out the fray.

JULIAN.—The cost of the Zulu War, which commenced January 11, 1879, was said to be about five and a quarter millions.

MURIEL.—Assuredly the swan can fly, its motion in the air being as graceful as on the water, the sweep of its wing being slow and powerful.

BEATRICE.—The words "colour" and "honour" were derived from the French, and were spelled with the "c."

POOR GIRL.—Apply to Government Emigrants' Information Office, 31, Broadway, London, S.W. About £20 to Western Australia, and don't think of going except there are friends to receive you there.

TOM.—The "sweating sickness" to which you refer was a disease which frequently prevailed in Europe and Asia during the middle ages, and which still often appears in Turkey and other parts of the countries named.

WORKMAN.—Whitewash may be preserved for future use by keeping the lime covered with water in a tub which has a cover, to prevent dust or dirt from falling into it. If the water is allowed to evaporate, the lime will become useless.

MOTHER.—To make ale flip boil one quart of ale in a saucepan. Then beat up the whites of two eggs, and add to them four tablespoonfuls of sugar. Pour the ale on slowly, and stir at the same time. Pour back and forth from one vessel to another for two or three minutes.

ANNIE.—The lines you quote:—
"But pleasures are like poppies spread,
You seize the flower, its bloom is shed!
Or like the snowfall in the river,
A moment white—then melts for ever."

will be found in "Tam O'Shanter," by Burns.

J. EVANS.—The bottle tree is found in Australia. It has a trunk of extraordinary expansion and disproportionateness which is greater when the ground is rocky, just below the branches. In fertile soil the foot of the tree is largest, forming a uniform cylindrical column, from whose summit the branches issue as from the neck of a bottle. Hence the name.

IS IT TRUE?—The southern portion of Florida, from about latitude 33, is described as mostly an extensive swamp or marsh, called the Everglades, which during the rainy season, between June and October, is impassable. North of this tract, to Georgia, the surface is generally a dead level, but in some parts it is undulating and occasionally hilly.

ROMANTIC.—It cannot be said to have been proved beyond doubt that Robin Hood existed. He is supposed to have lived in the twelfth century. The scene of his exploits is supposed to have been Sherwood Forest, in Nottinghamshire, England. Such a person may have existed, but, we presume, nearly all the tales told of are untrue.

CORA.—All housekeepers are troubled more or less by the salt used on the table becoming damp and refusing to shake from the castors, or, if in open dishes, it will gather moisture and is not easily used. A simple way of obviating the difficulty is to mix a pinch of corn starch with the salt. Try it, and you will no longer have the shakers anathematised.

SOLDIER.—Branding with hot irons was finally abolished as a punishment by an Act passed in the reign of George the Fourth. Deserters from the army are still liable to be marked with the letter D, the mark being made "with some ink or gunpowder, or other preparation, not liable to be obliterated," and being placed on the left side two inches below the armpit. (See the Mutiny Act of 1855.)

AMERICAN BEN.—The area of the United States is larger than that of Canada. The latter, exclusive of Territories, contains 305,040 square miles. The United States contain, including the Territories, the District of Columbia, the Indian Territory, and Alaska, 3,501,400. If to Canada be added the Territories, and the estimated area of the Arctic Islands, the total is only 3,470,392, or 31,012 less than that of the United States.

F. M.—The tune of Yankee Doodle was well-known in the reign of Charles I. It was then sung to the nursery rhyme, "Lucy Lookit lost her pocket." In the time of Cromwell, and supposed to have been written to satirise him, it was sung to the following rhyme:—

"Yankee Doodle came to town
Upon a Kentish pony;
He stuck a feather in his hat,
And called him Macaroni."

OFFICE FAILED.—To break glass in any required way, dip a piece of worsted thread in spirits of turpentine. Wrap it round the glass in the direction required to be broken, and then set fire to the thread; or apply a red hot wire round the glass. If it does not immediately crack throw cold water on it while the wire remains hot. By this means glass vessels that have been broken may often be fashioned and rendered useful for a variety of purposes.

CHANCE.—We advise you very seriously to remain where you are in the meantime, and to keep your eye open for the chance of a change to something else at home that would be worth taking with you to the colonies after you mastered it. It is as easy and much safer to "turn the hand to anything" at home, where there are one's friends to advise and help at every stage, than it would be in a strange land, with hundreds about you hungering for the chance you desired to profit by, and regarding you only as an obstacle in their way.

SAILOR.—All the chronometers made for the navy are tested and regulated before they are sent out on vessels, each one of which is supplied with three first-class chronometers, as well as one that is half used up, called a "hack," for carrying about and for rough service generally. It takes twenty-one weeks of testing to properly regulate and prove a chronometer, and part of the trial consists in subjecting the instrument to the action of cold in an ice box and to heat communicated through steam pipes. Each chronometer, when given out, is accompanied by a chart telling just how it will vary under certain temperatures.

SICK OF THEM.—There seems to be no limitation to the capacities of the "put the penny in the slot" machines. One of the latest things in this line, a London correspondent says, is the new Automatic Combination Machine. For his penny the person using it not only gets weighed, but has presented to him a ticket containing the date, his correct weight, and a portrait of some passing celebrity, a packet of bonbons, box of matches, or some other article, such as a finger penholder, and an insurance policy of £25 against accident, available for three weeks. This is what the new Quadruple Delivery Company's machine does, all for "a penny."

THE LONDON READER, Post-free. Three-halfpence Weekly; or Quarterly One Shilling and Eightpence.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS and VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of all booksellers.

NOTICE.—Part 330, Now Ready, price Sixpence, post-free, Eightpence. Also Vol. LV., bound in cloth, 4s. 6d.

ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 324, Strand, W.C.

††† We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

London: Published for the Proprietor, at 324, Strand, by J. R. SKEWER, and printed by WOODWARD and KINDER, 70 to 75, Long Acre, W.C.

